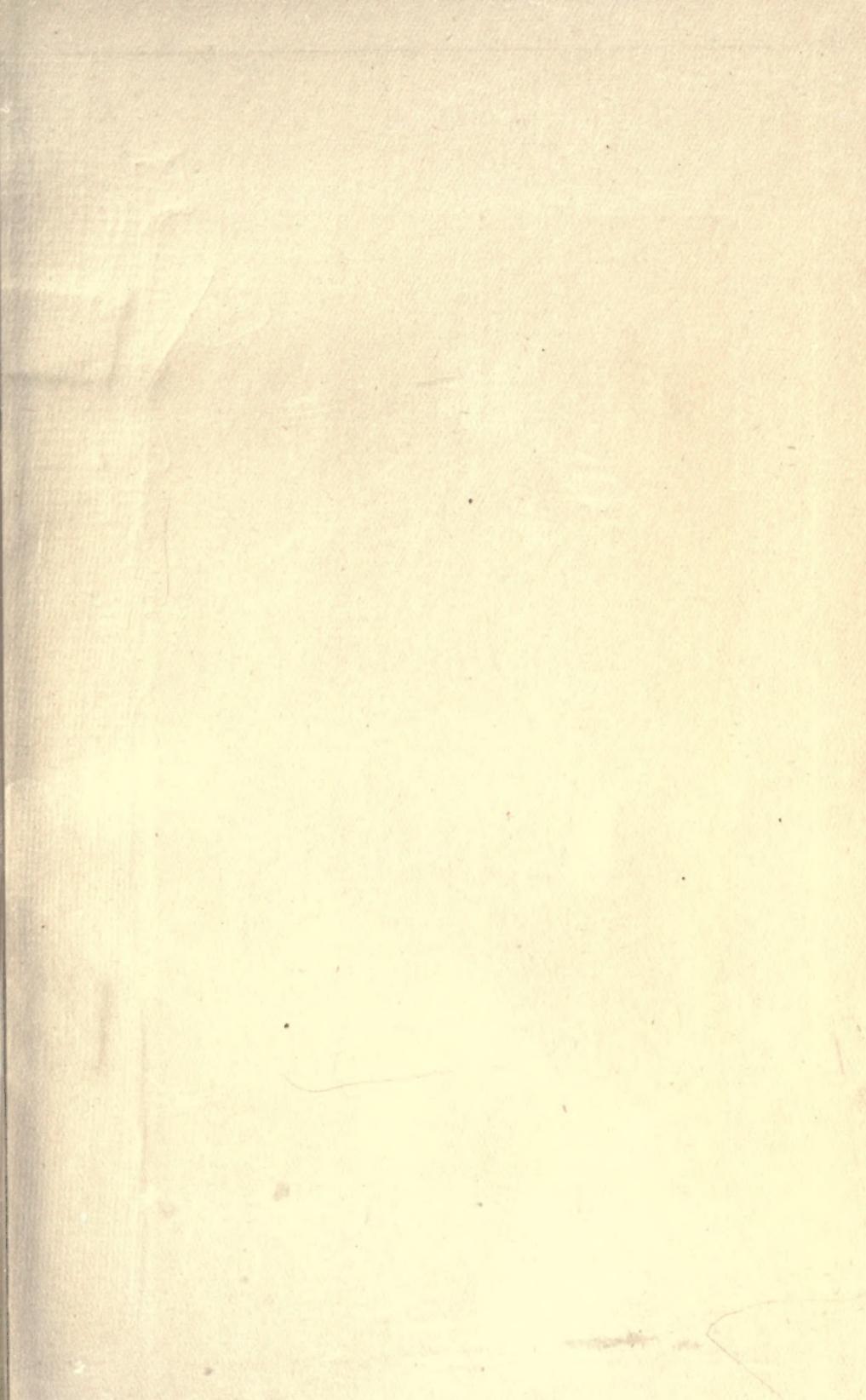


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HE LOVED BUT ONE

THE LATEST
SIX-SHILLING NOVELS

THE PARSON'S WOOD

VIOLET A. SIMPSON

CAPTAIN MAROON

ROBERT STUART

DEBORAH'S LIFE

JAMES BLYTH

THE THIRD KISS

HERBERT FLOWERDEW

THE WIND JAMMERS

T. JENKINS HAINS

THE PASSENGER FROM CALAIS

Major ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

MRS. ALEMERE'S ELOPEMENT

CHARLES MARRIOTT

THE WEB OF THE PAST

THE COUNTESS OF CROMARTIE

THE PROCESSION OF LIFE

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

BROTHERS OF PERIL

THEODORE ROBERTS

THE SEVEN STREAMS

WARWICK DEEPING

THE NUNNERY WALL

ELIZABETH HOLLAND

HE LOVED BUT ONE

THE STORY OF LORD BYRON AND MARY CHAWORTH

BY

FRANK FRANKFORT MOORE

AUTHOR OF "THE JESSAMY BRIDE" ETC.

"... he . . .
Had sigh'd to many though he loved but one"

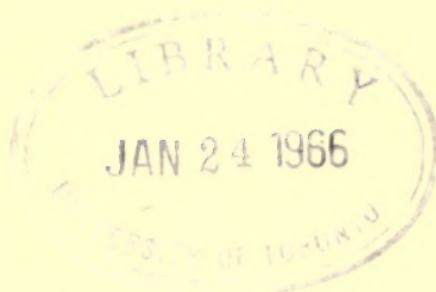
CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE

LONDON

EVELEIGH NASH

1905

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PART THE FIRST



CHAPTER I

IT was a strange night — breathless and soundless beneath a hot iron dome studded with innumerable stars. Looking at these stars one had an oppressive sense of peering through tiny holes in the iron door of a furnace at the seething flames within. That is what the boy on the horse thought when his mad gallop had ended, and the animal had recovered its breath and drunk at one of the shrunken pools of the mill-stream. There were nights on which he had looked at the stars, and they had seemed to him as the moth-holes in a mighty, violet velvet pall, through which the gleam of the golden streets of the heaven beyond was apparent to him ; and there were nights when he had seemed to see the quiver of accursed fires through the piercings in the pall. This was one of them.

The night was like a wild beast crouching—breathless—silent—cruelly cunning—waiting to leap upon its prey. That was his next fancy ; no boy that ever lived in the world had so many imaginings—so fantastic an imagination. The night was a wild beast, with a glossy black skin, and he was its prey—he could see its fiery eyes glaring at him. He was at this time looking at the stars from beneath a canopy of foliage ; for where the alders of the mill-pond become sparse an avenue of poplars straggled on to the knoll. Wheresoever his eyes looked he saw the red, fiery eyes of the beast glaring at him.

While he sat on his saddle gazing through the poplar boughs, his horse nosing the leaves on the

twigs, he felt that the night was something more than an ordinary wild beast: it was The Beast—the Old Dragon of the Apocalypse, which his Scotch nurse had told him about during the long winter nights at Aberdeen, sending him into a shivering sleep. The old woman was too good a Presbyterian to have a doubt respecting the material existence of the Old Dragon—she had talked to a man who had actually encountered it, only escaping its talons by the recollection of a timely text—and her convictions had become fused into the phantasms of the child's imagination. An unaccountable wind arose beyond the poplars, setting their leaves rustling like a long wave smashing and splintering upon a shallow beach of shells; it came upon the boy's face, filtered through the foliage, and yet hot—hot as the air that bursts from an oven when the door is suddenly opened—hot and foul as the breath from the mouth of the Fiery Dragon, it passed hissing its way down the long lines of straggling trees until it was whispering among the dry reeds of the pond.

The boy touched his horse with a spur and pushed out from the oppression of the trees; but in the open once more there came to him that sense of something awful watching him. For a few moments he felt overcome; but then, wheeling his horse until it faced the uncouth shapes of the trees, he rose in his stirrups and raised his whip above his head, shaking it threateningly—theatrically.

“I defy you, I defy you!” he cried into the night. “I defy all the powers! Do your worst! I shall not flinch! I am a man, and to be a man is to be a master of the world. Do your worst, do your worst! I am your master!”

His reading had been mostly of the man of gloom—the sombre personage who was stalking through romance during the early years of the nineteenth century—and the boy on the horse had conceived a great admiration for this hero. His own everyday griev-

ances assumed heroic proportions when contemplated through that lens of magnificent distortion, his imagination. That was why he was on horseback at midnight, galloping across the broadlands that lay between Southwell Village and Newstead Abbey, in the county of Nottingham. He had had a quarrel with his mother, and he had forsaken her roof on the strength of it. And now he was defying those indefinite Powers of the Air who somehow seemed to be taking her part. At that moment his fancy was dwelling so deeply on the gloomily heroic that it never struck him as ridiculous to think of the mysterious Powers of the Air busying themselves in a private family squabble. He had read Pope's Homer, and Homer tends to make men and boys have a pretty fair conceit of themselves. When Olympus was in a blaze because a shepherd was lovesick, it would be impossible to set any limits to the interest taken by the Powers in the affairs of men.

"I defy you all!" he cried; and then wheeling his horse once more, galloped into the starlit darkness of this warm night, and did not slacken his speed until he had been borne to the highest ridge, if it might be called a ridge, of the sloping lands. A windmill was on one hand, and on the other a small Norman church tower was faintly seen, with a white stone here and there among the many grey stones of the churchyard. The tinkle of a sheep's bell trickled through the silence from a far-off pasturage.

The horse was blown, and stood with lowered, outstretched neck, panting hard. The boy patted his burning withers, saying—

"Good Sultaun! Ah, if all friends were but as true as thou!"

He had a feeling of having got the better of the oppressive Powers that had been leagued against him. He began to peer into the darkness for some landmark that he knew; he had forsaken the road at his first wild gallop; his pause among the poplars

had lost him his bearings, and his second hard ride had carried him into miles of mystery. He did not know the windmill, and he had no notion in what direction the narrow road beside the old church led. Even if he had known so much he would not have known enough to be of any service to him. He had no acquaintance with the localities so far removed from the high road.

With the feeling, which tended to humiliation, that he was lost, came the resolution—

“ I will not return. Whatever may happen to me, I will never return ! ”

He spoke out his firm resolve into the still night, and he had no thought that he might find it difficult to go on to his destination. After all, one's destination is whither one's destiny leads.

From the elevated land on which he was standing his horse there was a splendid panorama of darkness round which his eyes might range. Darkness lay upon the world as a garment, with here and there the faint sparkle of a light in some homestead or some hamlet. Thinking of the darkness as a cloak, this imaginative boy thought of the sparkle as coming from one of its silver buttons. The cloak that lay upon the earth was far less bespangled than the garment of the heaven ; but now the stars were shining more faintly than they had shone when he had thought of them as dragons' eyes. The gems in the belt of Orion were topaz, and the Pleiades were as pale as pearls. Castor and Pollux were lustreless as paste and only the palpitating planet Venus was very low in the sky. Jupiter had climbed to the Lady in the Chair, and every now and then a feather of cloud brushed across his steadfast face, hiding it for a moment. The boy noticed this, but he was unable to trace the floating of the feather across any of the star-clusters that made the embroidery of the Chair.

“ Which is my star ? ” he said. “ Was I born under the influence of Jupiter or Venus—Jupiter,

the master of the leaven bolt, or Venus, wedded to the lame god—lame like me—a god, though lame? Where is the planet Vulcan? Surely that is my star—a crippled god—the patron of the halt, and wedded to Venus—a conception to make gods and men roar with laughter—ay, but Homeric laughter, not the vulgar chuckle of the herd."

There was something thorny in his own laughter at that moment, but it broke off with a sudden exclamation. Before his eyes in the Constellation of Leo three large meteors swept through the sky, leaving behind them trains like those of rockets, which gave them the aspect of comets in motion. They fled in different courses, and, unlike any shooting stars that he had ever seen, they were not evanescent; they buried themselves beneath the horizon, and their phosphorescent trains, each shaped like a folded fan, faded away gradually.

Before he had recovered from his astonishment, the celestial wonder had increased tenfold—a thousand-fold. From every quarter of the sky came meteors; some, in flying along through the stars, were as wisps of the marsh, vanishing in a breath; others rosy as a ruby and of a greater splendour than the Evening Star, melting into the distance, but leaving a brilliant streak to mark their pathway. The heavens were alive with light—moving, quivering, shooting, glancing, gleaming, living sparks. They crossed each other's courses; some seemed to meet in mid-air; some to slip along, diverging from one point like shoals of phosphorescent fry which one sees in the purple depths of a tropical gulf. About the seven stars of the Pleiades hundreds flashed and looked like fire-flies floating about a cluster of grapes so transparent that the moon could be seen shining through them. Thousands of these starry marvels were of the vapoury sheen of glow-worms, but many were crimson and enormous, blazing like red-hot shells shot from a mortar, illuminating the whole heaven

for several moments before they burst into innumerable fragments—fiery chips—with a crash, followed by a crackling.

The boy on the horse was overcome by the wonder of a phenomenon which he believed had never before occurred between the heaven and the earth. Once again his memory went back to the awfulness of the vision seen at Patmos by the Divine. He heard the hard voice of his old nurse reading of the terrors of the Last Judgment:

“And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth.”

Surely this was the night that St. John had foretold! The stars were falling, and the heavens would soon roll together as a scroll, the elements would melt with fervent heat, and then—the Last Trump.

He felt himself trembling in anticipation of the dread sound, but somehow he was not conscious of the terror which had come to him when he had heard the old Scotchwoman intoning the vision. He sat breathless on his horse, waiting for the scene of which this star-flight was the prelude, but he did not pray. He felt that nothing could move him to prayer at that moment. He knew that all the people in the world who were watching these stars fall from heaven were praying for mercy. That thought was of itself sufficient to prevent him from praying. But he waited, and before long the beauty of the spectacle absorbed all his attention, shutting out every apprehension as to what the next hour would bring forth. So he had more than once watched a thunderstorm, losing every sense of its danger in contemplating its grandeur. He had felt himself to be “a portion of the tempest,” and now he began to think of himself in connection with this miracle which was being enacted before his eyes.

He had felt, when he set out on this wild gallop in the early part of the night, that he was making his first real move into the world of action—the world in which he was determined to play a heroic

part—a striking part: in his mind the two were the same. Napoleon was his hero. The name of Napoleon filled all the world just then. There was no man in the world who was not a pygmy compared with Napoleon. He had heard of the portents in nature with which the obscure Corsican had been ushered into the world, and now the world was being suffocated with his name. What if this miracle of meteors had come to mark his own entrance into the world?

The heart of the boy, that was beating very fast, beat still faster, and swelled at the thought. He felt more passionately than ever those aspirations which had caused him at times to sit gloomily apart from his schoolmates at Harrow.

“A meteor—a meteor—I am one of them—I am one of ye,” he cried. “A miracle of meteors! By heaven! I would rather have the glorious moment of a meteor than live the changeless life of a fixed star. That is my destiny—to flame across the heavens with all the eyes in the world upon me, not to remain a star for a sailor to steer by. My destiny is to be a portent, not a guide to men.”

He almost shouted out his words into the night, and he had scarcely ceased when the whole heaven was illuminated. What seemed to be a ball of fire almost as large as a full moon rushed across the sky, leaving a molten track behind it as broad as the bands of a rainbow, and plunged into the darkness of the west, making it blaze like a furnace. It was the largest of the meteors of that marvellous night; and it had the shriek of a bomb-shell.

The horse sprang with its four legs into the air at the first blaze of the light, and when, a few seconds later, the awful sound ran across the sky, it reared with a snort of terror, and then made a wild dash for—anywhere.

It went down the sloping ground and through a low, straggling hedge into a field that contained the

stubble of the wheat harvest. A shallow stream—the same that was dammed for the old mill three miles away—opened itself abroad where there was a dip in the land. The horse went through the marsh in a single splash. On across the level it sped, and, with a crash of splintering timber, through a padlocked gate and into the midst of a flock of sheep, that fled to right and left with heart-breaking bleats. The rider was but dimly aware of the creamy backs rolling into the distance like the frothy white breaking waves on the ridge of an unseen reef. The sound of the bleating was already faint behind him, and still the horse was flying *ventre à terre*. It seemed to crouch before every mad stride that it made. He had a feeling that it was a belt of trees which formed the grey line zig-zagging across the meadow beyond the sheep pasture. That was his first thought of danger. He made a feeble attempt to pull the beast round to where a gap was faintly apparent. He might as well have tugged at the trunk of an oak. The horse was going straight for the trees, as if it had been struck blind.

Down to the animal's neck he bent his head—it was his only chance. As the horse went straight at the belt he felt boughs scraping along his back, each leg was struck by a broken branch, and in his ears there was a rattling sound of crackling twigs, while a bunch of foliage swept across his face.

It was all over in a second. The horse had passed through the obstruction and was shooting across the meadow. The rider managed to retain his seat. He saw on each side the great, shapeless bulk of sleeping cattle. Only one or two were on their feet. He went by them in a flash. The turf had a spring in it that seemed to put fresh life into the beast, for this wild gallop—its third within a few hours—was the swiftest of the night. It stimulated the ever-active imagination of a boy, and he thought of himself as in a boat flying from crest to crest of the waves.

He might have thought of a wreck, for the horse was within a hundred yards of a gate far too high to leap over and far too strong to be broken down without breaking down its assailant. Beyond it there seemed to be a wall surmounted by a torrent of foliage.

Straight for the gate the animal went. The rider tugged at the reins, throwing himself back in the saddle; and at that moment he felt that the Last Day was indeed following hard on the miracle of the falling stars—his own Last Day—he had been a fool to expect the sound of the angel's trumpet first—there it was before him—the gate to Eternity !

Straight for it ! His horse made no attempt at a leap. It gathered itself together for a charge and rushed at the obstacle. There was a crash—a shivering of wood—a whirl. The rider felt himself swung high into the air—then sinking down deep into a sombre sea whose waves stung every limb with the sting of thorns—and then he ceased sinking, and swung and swung, gasping for breath, and striking out strongly with his arms among hard waves that bound his limbs as with whipcord—he swung and swung until there came a sudden crackling of timber, and he found his feet on solid earth, and the broken bough of a tree in his hands.

CHAPTER II

IT took him some time to realise what had happened —by what agency he had been saved from death. He could not understand how he came to be standing under a tree with a high wall beside him. After the excitement of that whirlwind race, the sudden change into rest and silence was like passing from the fierce struggle with death into oblivion. He was conscious of aching limbs, of a body torn by twigs and pommelled by boughs. And there was that high wall beside him shutting him off from everything. His lame foot was paining him. He seated himself on the spreading roots of the tree, from which the sinking of the wall had drawn the earth, leaving them exposed, and, collecting his scattered senses, was able in some moments to account for his position.

He remembered that hurricane rush at the gate—he had seen for a second the narrow strip of roadway and the wall with the curve of autumnal foliage spreading over its ivy; but still . . . then it came upon him with a flash: he had been thrown over the horse's head across the roadway and into the boughs of the tree actually on the farther side of the wall.

There could be no doubt about it. He could trace his descent through the obstructive boughs that had saved his neck by yielding gently to his weight, breaking his fall, but being themselves broken by the effort.

Curiously enough, his first thought was: What would his mother think if he had been killed and

his mangled body brought to her in the morning ? He had parted from her in anger. He was not so overwhelmed with joy at the reflection that he was alive and only indifferently mangled as to be incapable of thinking that it was rather a pity he had not been killed, if only to teach his mother a lesson. Her temper was unendurable.

Then he thought of the portent of the meteoric shower. Was this all that it meant ? Was this miracle of falling, blazing worlds (he assumed that they were stars, and he had learned that stars were worlds) brought about solely to portend his accident ? He laughed at the notion, and pulled aside an obscuring branch from above his head, so that he might see if the stars were still falling ; but he was unable to get a fair view of the sky.

Lastly, the thought came to him—and it was a humiliating one—that the enterprise on which he had set his heart must be abandoned. He had had certain very heroic designs, but how could he now hope to realise them ? On horseback he might have passed as one of the gloomy, cloaked heroes who were frowning their way through romances in prose and verse at the period, but on foot—where were the elements of the heroic in the spectacle of a lame boy bareheaded—he had lost his cap long before his final catastrophe—and wearing a tattered jacket ?

He felt greatly discouraged at the cutting short of his enterprise. The smallest of all the stars that he had seen falling was typical of his disaster : his disaster did not call for so imposing a display as he had witnessed. He felt utterly helpless. Without his horse he could not even return to his mother's house to ask her forgiveness, and to submit once more to the terrors of her tongue.

He pulled himself up among the branches of the tree that had played so friendly a part in regard to him a short time before, and soon reached the top of the wall. From this point of vantage he was able

to see how great was the distance that he had been thrown. The road between the gate and the tree was more than ten feet broad, and the wall was certainly eight feet high. He had read of the catapults of the Romans which sent men whirling through the air. He felt that he could write a chapter on the sensations of one of the victims of this implement.

The gate beneath him had two of its highest bars smashed, and across the lowest lay the body of the horse. It was a sickly sight to be seen even beneath the pale light of the stars—the immovable stars ; and for a time the boy, looking down on it, was overcome. He fancied that he was more concerned about the death of his horse than he was about his own escape from destruction. He looked for a way of descent, but found none. The wall was too high to allow of his reaching the ground by a drop, and the night was too dark to let him see any crevices for his foot between the stones. He crept along the top for some distance, hoping to discover some palpable breaking away of the mortar : he wondered what the poachers did. Surely they were neglectful. He wearied himself to no purpose. Even the ivy, from which he had great hopes, had its roots on the inner side of the wall.

He was forced to descend by the branches of the tree in which he had lodged when thrown over his horse's head, and doing so, found himself in what seemed to be a spacious park. From his position on the wall he had seen, rising above the dark clouds of foliage in the distance, what he thought might be the arch of a gable. If he was right, that was probably part of the mansion which the park encircled, and the carriage drive would be easily found if he only managed to reach the building. He discovered a woodman's track, and following it for some way, came upon a gravel walk which in turn brought him to a broad avenue. He was approaching it from the rear, and walking with difficulty. A quarter of an hour

had passed before he was abreast of the stable buildings and the high walls of an orchard. A few more minutes were sufficient to reveal the mansion itself, but the moment he went round the curve of the avenue and the great gable arose before his eyes, he gave a cry of astonishment, and clapped his hands boyishly, with a laugh.

“Who would have thought it?” he cried. “Who would have thought it?”

The dead blackness of the night gave to the place the aspect of an etching. It was still as stone. House, trees, garden—all as silent as if hewn out of a quarry of black marble. There were cypresses on the cleared land space; they spread out long arms draped in black velvet, without the least motion. There was a long, high wall of yew, clipped in fantastic shapes of peacocks and bears and monsters. They looked like a row of stone sculptures. A stone pediment at one end of a low terrace in front of the house was surmounted by the figure of a bear supporting a quartered shield. The boy limped to the figure and leant against it, looking along the front of the ancient priory.

“My destiny again,” he said. “It was my destiny to be pitched headlong into my own estate—to find my own doors closed in my face. I meant to ride up to the gates and to enter with the dignity of the rightful master, and yet here I am!”

He did not need a light and a looking-glass to tell him what was his appearance at that moment. His hair, luxuriant in its curls, was tossed; his face was scratched, and his clothes were soiled and torn. The figure which he cut was very different from that which he had designed for himself. He felt humiliated. Not for many minutes, however, for the desire to assert himself, which all through his life was strongest when he had received his heaviest rebuff, came upon him with irresistible force. He flung himself away from the stone ornament, crossed the terrace walk to

the hall door, and gave the swinging iron chain of the bell a mighty pull.

Beyond a doubt he felt a huge desire to turn and fly for a place of hiding when he heard the clang of the bell within, but he stood his ground, and, after the lapse of an unreasonably short time, sent the bell jangling more wildly than before.

He had no need to do it a third time. He heard the sound of a shutter being released and a window opened above his head. He looked up and saw first the huge bell-mouth of a blunderbuss covering him, and then the head of a man projected cautiously beyond the level of the sill.

The blunderbuss seemed to discharge a grape charge of oaths, after which the inquiry as to what was the business of the caller at such an hour sounded tame as the sound of a popgun. The voice was that of a man.

“Come down and open the door without a moment’s delay. ‘Tis Lord Byron who commands you,” cried the boy firmly.

Equally firm was the reply that came from the voice at the window.

“I’ll give you till I count ten to get out of range, my gentleman,” it said. “I’ll stir your stumps for you, whether you be Lord Byron or Lord Harry, or Lord Knows Who. Off!”

“Insolent scoundrel!” cried the boy. “I discharge you from my service from this moment.”

“And I’ll discharge my blunderbuss in my master’s service when I count ten,” said the man in the nightcap. He had put out his head far enough to let young Byron see that he was wearing a nightcap, one of the pattern that made men look like idiots—a bobbing tassel, and so forth. The boy remembered to have seen such a nightcap on the head of a man with such a bell-mouthed blunderbuss in a caricature; but he did not laugh at the recollection. On the contrary, he became angrier than he had been before.

The indignity of being refused an entry to his own house was surely all the greater when it came through so absurd an agent.

"You are a fool," he shouted up to the window.

"One—two—three—four—five," intoned the voice above his head.

The boy took a step or two back. The sweep of the carriage drive round a broad lake was edged with small white flints, which marked its course on the darkest night. Before the man with the nightcap had come to "seven," Byron had kicked one of these pebbles out of its foundation, and the sound of the intoned "eight" was lost in the crash of breaking glass, a wild oath, and a tremendous explosion.

In another moment it seemed as if all the dogs in the county had their tongues loosed. From within the house—every room might have held a dog—from the buildings behind, from houses that seemed to be close at hand—from farms in the distance—came the barking of dogs—"mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound and curs of low degree"—the air was being worried; the night became hideous with the tongues of dogs.

The nightcap had left the window. It might have been knocked off by the explosion of the bell-mouth; for that matter, the head that it surmounted might have been blown into the room. The boy below failed for some minutes to hear the oaths that came through the broken casement, so continuous was the clamour of the dogs. But soon his mind was set at rest in regard to the man. He was alive.

A light appeared at another window. It revealed female drapery—a flutter of white; a woollen shawl scrambled over the shoulders of a nightdress; an elderly woman's face framed in frills.

The barking became less furious. The boy could hear the man ramming down the lead into the gaping gun with oaths for wadding, also a shrill question or two yelled from the room with the candle. A second

wave of barking and yelping and baying and howling dashed against the echoing walls of the old mansion. Young Lord Byron stooped to dislodge another of the white pebbles—he had hurt his foot kicking out the first—and when he straightened himself he found a man facing him.

He started back, nearly overbalancing himself on that paved border of the carriage sweep. The man helped him to keep his feet, and then kept a light hand on his wrist.

“Who are you? And what do you do here at this hour?” asked the man, in no rude tone.

“I am Lord Byron. I suppose that I may come to my home, Newstead Abbey, when I please, without being answerable to any servant?” replied the boy. “Take your hand off my wrist, sir.”

The man obeyed, after a moment’s pause and a queer laugh.

“Oh, you are my Lord Byron, are you?” he said. “I suppose that in a coal-black night the son of a hind would pass for the son of a lord, to say nothing of the grand-nephew of one; but there are certain signs. This night is not so dark but that one with eyes—one close to you, mind, not up at a window with a brass gun-barrel dazzling his eyes—can see a youth with a head like a maid’s mop in its second year, bare of hat or cap, mind, and a jacket that points to a burglary in the demesne of a scarecrow, and—”

“Who are you, pray, that comments with such freedom?” said the boy, feeling very ill at ease, through a consciousness of his condition. He was even more sensitive than a boy on such a point.

“I suppose that our relations at this moment give me a certain privilege of comment—the comment of inquiry,” said the man. “You are the subject of inquiry. Are you a lord? Then why come in the disguise of a—let us say, a common boy? A disguise is always suspicious, is it not? And a peer

does not always bear a coroneted face, though sometimes the rascalities of one's ancestors are faithfully transmitted."

"Suspect as you please, I tell you that I am Lord Byron, and it is my pleasure to sleep within Newstead to-night."

"How do you propose convincing the man with the blunderbuss that you are Lord Byron? A man with a blunderbuss and no brains to prevent him from using it is like a mongrel coachman on the hammer-cloth—the master of a thoroughbred between the shafts. The head of my Lord Byron can't resist the argument of a handful of leaden slugs any better than the head of a hind. A brace of slugs will turn the liveliest intellect to a numskull."

The boy was puzzled, failing to catch the exact drift of the man's phrases. But before he had time to betray his condition, there was the sound of bolts being withdrawn and chains slipped. The hall door was opened and the thin light of a lantern showed the stout figure of a man in the framework of the doorway, pushing well in front of him the yawning gun. Over his left shoulder appeared a woman's face in its frame of frills. The man laid down the lantern on the topmost step and raised his weapon.

"Hold hard, Dickon," said the man outside. "Hold hard. I have my hand on the trespasser."

Still the other kept the blunderbuss to his shoulder.

"Sure—are ye sure of him, Mr. Vince? If not, I can riddle him from here; I can make a sieve of him. You stand to one side—twenty yards or so; the slugs scatter," said he.

"For the Lord's sake—for this young lord's sake—and my sake too, man, lower that gaping, toothless mouth of her. I don't want her to spit slugs in my face," said the one outside. "'Tis not a master trespasser, only an apprentice—a boy."

"A boy—a boy. Let me get hands on him," cried the man at the door, stooping for his lantern.

But his bravery was obstructed by a clutching hand from behind. A figure in a petticoat and shawl, frills and a broad bow of muslin under the chin, became shakily luminous.

"You'll not stir, Mr. Dickon ; you haven't a son of your own," cried the woman.

"Keep back, woman ; is this a time for polite reproaches ?" said the man, straining at his garment—a stout, middle-aged Joseph resisting a Potiphar's wife with grey, wispy side curls bubbling among the frills of her cap.

"We'll have no hasty bloodshed if I can help it," said the woman. "Bring the boy hither, Mr. Vince. You can manage him single-handed without the aid of this bloodthirsty monster. Laura mercy ! you must have had a terrible struggle. The lad's lamed and his garments are a sight ! Help him nigh. I hope 'tis dark enough for my modesty, Mr. Vince. A nightcap is honourable."

"It never was worn by Venus, or any of her hussies, Mrs. Barwell," said the man whom she had called Mr. Vince. "Here's the trespasser, only don't give me credit for his struggles ; they took place in his attempt to capture the outer fort of the citadel, I don't doubt. He has his story."

"No fears ! he'll have a new chapter with a coalhole in it before morn," said the lantern-man putting out a large hand and grabbing the boy by the shoulder.

The boy swung a good blow with his fist on the man's arm with an indignant—

"How dare you, sirrah ?"

The man carried off a handful of broadcloth, for it was just the shoulders of the jacket that had suffered most in the ride through the trailing, scraping branches.

Mr. Vince laughed to see the man clap his other hand to his arm with a quick oath, followed by—

"The young adder ! An unprovoked assault ! You are a witness, Mr. Vince."

"The lad has spirit. Who is he, anyways?" asked the woman.

"He is my Lord Byron, the owner of Newstead Estate. A genial home-coming for his lordship! The welcome of barking bulldogs and the hurrah of a blunderbuss," said Mr. Vince.

CHAPTER III

“WHAT nonsense is this, Mr. Vince ?” said the woman. The man had ceased to rub his arm. Both his arms had fallen to his sides in a clumsy caricature of the “attention” attitude of the barrack yard. His mouth had become like that of his own weapon, now gaping up at him from where he had placed it at the door jamb.

“What is this jest of your making, Mr. Vince ?” she repeated, eyeing the boy.

“No jest, i’ faith !” said Mr. Vince. “What, are you in doubt ? You must be hard to convince. Here you have a lad in a tattered jacket and a face that’s black where it’s not bleeding, coming without notice to Newstead Priory an hour after midnight, throwing a stone up to a window, and then expecting that people freshly awaked will accept his word that he’s Lord Byron come to take up residence at his own place. Is there anyone in the world who would act in such a way except the son of Mad Jack Byron and the grand-nephew of the late much-lamented peer who made Newstead the pivot on which his antics revolved for years ? Of course this is Lord Byron.”

“Bless us !” cried the woman. “Where’s his ma ?”

“I will overlook my treatment to-night,” said the boy with a grand air, and in a voice that suggested dignified clemency. “I will assume that your fault was due to an excess of zeal. Get me a bottle of wine and something to eat. I prefer champagne, if it is first-rate ; failing that, old port. Light the sconces

in the dining-hall and arouse a lackey or two to attend. You, sir," he turned to Mr. Vince, "will, I hope, do me the honour to sup with me."

Mr. Vince bowed to the very ground with his right hand upon his heart. The young man thought him excessively polite, and so he was—excessively. It was too dark to see the expression on his face.

"Oh, my lord, your lordship is too vastly generous," said he when his body was bent to its perigee. "I am your lordship's most obedient servant to command. The night is warm for this time of the year, my lord, as your lordship may—"

"Stop there," cried the man who had been spoken to as Dickon. "Stop there, if you please. I know naught of any Lord Byron. I have no order to give admittance to anyone of that name, whether he be the owner of Newstead or not. This is Newstead, but as you know, Mr. Vince, it has been let for the past year to my Lord Grey de Ruthven. I'm his butler and nobody else's. What do you say, Mrs. Barwell? Mrs. Barwell is my lord's housekeeper, and we have been left in charge, as you know, Mr. Vince, against his lordship's homecoming from the north in another month. I can never quite make you out, Mr. Vince, and that's a fact; but if this is a jest of yours all I can say is that 'tis a sorry one."

He gave a searching glance at the young Lord Byron, beginning at his head, his lordship's strong point, and finishing at his feet, his lordship's weak point. The intimacy of his scrutiny seemed to embolden him, for he straightened himself, put his arms akimbo, and said firmly—

"No, I'm ashamed of nothing, and I'll be hanged if anybody, Lord or Common, enters the mansion that I'm charged with the care of, and the more he tries to lord it the surer I am that I am in the right. That's all there is to be said by me, unless Mrs. Barwell has thought of saying a word."

He nodded sideways in the direction of the house-

keeper, but without looking at her. Mr. Vince looked at her inquiringly, not without a smile.

"Poor lad—poor lad! he is very wild! There is a story behind him," said she. This was friendly, and not compromising.

"Look you here, young man—I mean, my—well, I'll go as far as 'sir'—that covers all," resumed the butler. "Look you here, young sir, if you are all that you say you are, how is it that you didn't ask for my lord—Lord Grey de Ruthven? Answer me that; but don't expect that I'll let you by me upon your reply, mind that."

"You are not bound to plead without conditions, my lord," said Mr. Vince.

"It was kept from me. I never heard that Newstead was let to a stranger," said Lord Byron. "I suppose they knew that I never would allow such a thing to happen. Of course, I could not think of entering now. I find the door of my ancestors shut in my face. I shall not soon recover from this blow; but it has been experienced by others before me."

"True, my lord. There have been many instances of suchlike jugglery of Fate," said Mr. Vince. "They say that the Prior of this very Newstead was on a pilgrimage to the Sepulchre, when our bluff, black-guard Bluebeard turned out the monks, and he heard nothing of what had happened until he landed in the Humber and rode up to the door of his priory—it was at the other side of the gable wall, I believe—only to find it barred and with the king's seal upon it. The poor old churchman with his scallop shell wandered about the park all through that winter's night and was found dead in the morning, probably where we are standing at this moment."

The boy's eyes were alight.

"I never heard the tale before, sir," said Byron. "It is a touching one. Is it possible that it has never been told by a poet? It would commend itself to Mr. Walter Scott, of Edinburgh. I have just read

his *Minstrelsy of the Border*. He gives more than one ballad of the palmer with his scallop shell."

The boy had listened with increasing interest while the man told the story, and now he was standing with his back turned to the stout caretaker and the befrilled housekeeper. He had forgotten their existence, he had forgotten his own exclusion from the house which he had meant to enter with dignity. The gates of another and a more precious demesne had been opened in front of him, and he had already taken a step across the boundary. He could feel the ambrosial airs of those broad, unknown regions ; he was already dimly aware of the awaking music of their woods—the minstrelsy of their waters.

Mr. Vince looked at him in silence, and then laughed. The boy drew himself up with a start, back into the region of the commonplace.

"What," cried Mr. Vince, "is it possible that a Byron is susceptible to sentiment—to something besides the wasting of substance in riotous living, followed by the inevitable husks which the swine do eat? Go away, boy, you are an impostor—no true Byron."

"I said he was an impostor from the first, coming hither at midnight! Where is his cap? Look at his coat. A young rascal scamp!" said the caretaker, advancing with a menace—not too provocative a one: his arm still had an ache.

Vince put up a staying hand.

"Go to your bed, my good friend Dickon," he said. "The ghost of the dispossessed Prior of Newstead will not haunt your slumbers, be assured of that. This is indeed young Lord Byron, and he will send you a guinea in the morning for having disturbed your serenity—the serenity of the unimaginative, the placidity of emptiness as to the head and of repletion as to the stomach. My lord will be the first to acknowledge your zeal as the defender of his home against himself. If the Byrons had ever found some

to defend them against themselves, the house would to-day stand on a firmer foundation. My Lord Byron,"—he turned to the boy,—“you will not enter Newstead at this time. If you have no plans of your own, it may be that you will honour my humble cottage by accepting its shelter till morning. It will not overtax your lordship to walk thither—’tis hard by the entrance gates. Believe me, my lord, to obtain the shelter of a friendly cottage is not a wholly unsatisfactory end even for such as set out with high hopes of occupying a mansion. A roof is a roof, and four square foot of roof is a shelter for any man—a Royal Duke can need no ampler.”

He bowed to Lord Byron, and this time with no affectation of the elaborate, which before had suggested a scheme of mockery to the sensitive youth against whom it had been directed.

The butler-caretaker picked up his lantern, listening, with half-turned head while he stooped, for the doubtful young lord’s answer to the man’s courtesy—Mr. Dickon ever felt a ringing in his head after Mr. Vince had been speaking; but he had a vague impression of the meaning that showed itself here and there among the cross-work of phrases, as a hen’s egg reveals itself laid among the hay of a manger.

“I thank you, sir,” said the boy.

“Good-night, Mr. Vince,” said the man with the lantern.

“Good-night, Mr. Vince and—and—my lord,” said the woman, with a gasping tremolo.

“Good-night to you both,” said Mr. Vince. “Caretaker, you have taken care. Housekeeper, you have kept the house. His lordship’s guinea to each of you.”

“H’m!” breathed the man nasally. The woman gave her shawl a twitch. They were too comfortably placed to thaw appreciably beneath the warmth of a poor man’s promise that a minor whom they had shut out from his house would send them a guinea.

The bolts and chains rattled in the hall, and then came the flat slap of slippers feet crossing the bare floor.

Byron laughed, and the man beside him followed—at his leisure.

“They have their doubts about me. I cannot blame them. But how is it that you have none, Mr.—I believe they called you Mr. Vince ?” said the boy.

“I believe I gave you my reasons,” he replied. He spoke naturally now, with no “my lording.” “Only a Byron would appear in such a guise at such an hour with such an object.”

“The guise of a guy, I admit, and the object—”

“Ha, — that’s it — what was your object ? I understood that you were at Harrow-on-the-Hill—a student perhaps, a fighter certainly. Ha, ‘Crede Byron’—that is the motto of your race and some have taken it in earnest and suffered for their error. This is the way to the lodge. I am one of the living errors which resulted from taking the motto in earnest. Shall we move ? We have not far to go. Do not disdain a shoulder to lean upon.”

“I have gone through a good deal since nightfall, and even if I were not lame, I should have good reason to be tired. I believe, if they had not seen that I was lame, that man and the woman there would have treated me with more respect ; but a peer with a foot like mine looks as foolish as a foreigner to such people. They think that a peer must be perfect.”

“They do, in spite of all the plainest evidence in opposition. I would not say that you were a cripple, Lord Byron.”

“But I am one. When people are with me for any time they forget it. What was your first thought when you saw that I was limping ? Tell me that, Mr. Vince.”

"Nemesis, I thought of Nemesis. Of course, Dr. Drury taught you all about Nemesis?"

"By book and birch. Indeed, Mr. Vince, he made Nemesis seem a very living power when we had been guilty of something flagrant. But you say that you looked on me as the Nemesis of the House of Byron. Well, do you think that I am that now, Mr. Vince?"

"His late lordship, of blessed memory, was of that opinion."

"Ah, I have heard that my grand-uncle had good reason to think that every foot that halted in his neighbourhood meant the approach of Nemesis! Heavens, sir, did he think so little of his crimes as to suppose that a child would be sufficient to do the work of a faithful Nemesis in his case?"

"He hated your father and your father's father, and yet he lived to know that their offspring was the heir. That was how he felt that you were a sort of Nemesis. I have heard him curse you roundly and soundly for an interloper."

He ceased. Byron made no comment, but leant heavily upon his friendly shoulder, and, after some jerky movements, withdrew his hand and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, breathing hard.

"You cannot be overcome by reason of what I have told you," said Mr. Vince.

"Oh no," said Byron. "I only paused in order to hear the sound of ghostly, mocking laughter. Have ghosts any sense of humour, do you think?"

"I daresay—humour of a sort."

"Then the spirit of my grand-uncle must be convulsed, having witnessed the reception of his heir when he made an attempt to enter into possession of the hall which he vacated. It must surely have been his merry malevolence that led me to Newstead to-night. How he must have chuckled when I was greeted with the salvo from the blunderbuss!"

"If he had had any hand in the business he would have made the man aim straight."

"Oh no ; that would have shown a disposition to be merciful. A handful of slugs in the brain early in life—is there anything better for a Byron ? "

"It is now that you should hear the ghostly laughter. The inheritor of Newstead speaks in the vein of Diogenes within a stone's throw of the ancient walls."

"Within a blunderbuss' shot, you mean."

"Ah yes, to be sure ; it was the Priory window that was within a stone's throw of you. You smashed one pane."

"And you saved me from smashing another. Was your sudden appearance at that spot as remarkable as mine, do you think, Mr. Vince ? Are you accustomed to roam these grounds at midnight ? Have you the privilege ? Perhaps you are the steward. Everybody seems to know more about Newstead than Lord Byron. To think that there was no one to tell me that the place had been let ! Are you the steward ? "

"Do you suggest that I should render to you an account of my stewardship, my lord ? My shoulder is at your service once more. That is how they travelled in the old days—my lord with his hand on the shoulder of his steward."

The boy was extremely glad of the friendly support, and so they resumed their walk.

"You can tell me some matters that others conceal, about my property," said the boy.

"I can tell you everything ; but I am not the steward," said the man.

"Pray inform me who you are," cried Byron.

"I am the son of my mother, but not of my father."

"What does that mean ? "

"It means that my father was Lord Byron, and that I bear my mother's name, not his."

"I daresay that you bear the more honourable name," said Byron after a long silence.

"Oh, fie, my lord ! Think of your ancestors—think of your own father. Why, there is hardly one

of the race that did not attain to such distinction as is only granted to princes—the distinction of a picturesque adjective. It was not *Byron the Good*, nor *Byron the Great*—it was not ‘*il Magnifico*,’ as in the case of one *Lorenzo*, nor ‘*the Silent*,’ as with a certain *William*. No, my lord, your father was *Byron the Mad*, and your great-uncle was *Byron the Bad*. So the voice of the people confers a name without a baptism—it is linked with distinction for ever.”

“Linked with distinction, do you call it? I call it handcuffed to distinction.”

“It could not be more aptly described. It marks the arrest of the felon, and this is the end of our journey.”

They had reached the entrance to a cottage which stood at some distance from the carriage drive, almost hidden among its trees.

CHAPTER IV

BYRON expressed his surprise. Who could tell that a cottage existed in this place? "Was it a kind of Rosamund's Bower?"

"One would fancy so, did not one know that the builder was never known to make the attempt to conceal any of his wickedness," said Vince. "Ostentation in evil amounted to a foible with him. He dreamed of the glory of the title 'the Bad Byron.' He must have died happy in the knowledge that his claim was universally recognised."

"Was there no dissentient voice from the popular verdict?" asked Byron. "Who lived here long ago?"

"There was one dissentient," said Vince slowly. "She lived in this cottage. She was my mother. But that is a woman's life—to love and to forgive. My poor mother did both to excess."

He struck a light and applied it to a candle on the table of the room into which Byron, following him, had groped his way. It was a small apartment, but it held some rare bits of furniture, and the walls were covered with tapestry pictures. The table was laid as if for supper, with every evidence of refinement. There was a white chicken, with a green salad, an abundance of fruit, and a bottle of white wine.

"There is enough for two," said the host, surveying the table. Byron was doing the same; and then he gave a turn that caused him to face the candle. The boy started, and was at the point of crying out, for it might have been his own father who was standing

there, so close was the likeness between the man and the picture of the boy's father which had once hung over the mantelpiece of his mother's lodgings. It had been painted when they were in France, and, although Byron professed to have a recollection of his father, it was chiefly from the picture that he knew what manner of man he was. And that picture was now animate before his eyes.

Mr. Vince saw the start that he gave, and smiled.

"Yes," he said, "I have been told at home and abroad that I bore a remarkable resemblance to the man who was called 'Mad Jack' by his associates. The likeness brought me nothing but trouble, not only that trouble which takes the form of figures on a sheet of paper with a tot, but also that which takes the form of an enraged husband or a hasty brother. Never mind, I would rather be taken for Mad Jack than for a good man. Fix your attention upon the table, Lord Byron; your father never failed in his duty to himself in that respect, whatever his shortcomings in other directions may have been."

Byron was conscious of a little sting now and again when he heard his father referred to with the slights of one to whom mockery seemed to come easily. But he was hungry. He looked at the table.

"You could not have expected a visitor at such an hour," he said. "But there is certainly enough for two, even when one of the two has such a hunger as mine."

"It is true that I did not expect a visitor," said Vince. "Though I admit that I might have looked for a distinguished visitor, considering the portent of the stars. You saw that extraordinary thing to-night? I went up to the highest ground to watch the display, neglecting my supper. It was on my return through the grounds that I caught a faint glimpse of you. Thank Heaven that I was able to bring about a cessation of hostilities before greater damage was done! And now in the name of reason

will you tell me what impulses led you to attempt to take Newstead by storm to-night ? ”

Byron was eating of the meat and drinking of the wine before him. In the satisfaction which he was beginning to feel, he was losing something of the sense of humiliation of which he had been conscious, when he had found Newstead closed against him. After the second tumbler of wine he could even think of the matter in the light of a diverting escapade.

“ I suppose that I am something of a fool,” he said. “ I wonder, as you have heard so much of our family and its history, if you know anything of my mother ? ”

“ Nothing save that she had a fortune and a temper. Your father dissipated the former and fled from the latter. Has she found that you are his heir-at-law ? ”

Byron did not at once appreciate the drift of the question. When he did so, he reddened.

“ I am answered,” said Vince. “ If you had inherited her temper you would have run a knife into me for my insolence.”

“ I am not hurt,” said Byron. “ You told me what my father had done. It was his example that I was following to-night.”

“ In the running away ? ”

“ In the running away. She provoked me beyond endurance. It would seem as if she took a pleasure in doing so.”

“ Not a pleasure—a duty. A Scotch mother assumes the rôle of Providence. She visits the sins of the father upon the children. She is paying back her Mad Jack through you. And so you ran away ? ”

“ Not on my own two legs, as you can suppose. I meant to ride up to the door of Newstead and assert my right to enter. My design was frustrated by my horse. I had been watching that marvellous display of meteors. You saw the large one ? ”

“ And heard it too.”

“ So did my horse. I had run away from my

mother, and now my horse ran away with me. He tore through a belt of trees. It was their boughs that left me in tatters. We must have gone over miles at that rush. It was only brought to an end by the gate at the bottom of the last field. I was sent flying over his head and into the boughs of a tree on the other side of the wall. That, you will say, was a true Byron episode."

"To become the meteor of a moment—yes. To escape death by a hair's breadth—yes."

"To make a headlong entrance upon a heritage and to find that, after all, another man was in possession—that, I think, is not out of keeping with the family traditions."

"I agree with you, and I know more of the family traditions than you, my Lord Byron. The Byrons never could do anything like other people. They were always original, and to be original is to be hated. It was the lucky ones of the name who were hated. The others were loved. I have been wondering what your fate will be. Will you find the love that women will fling at you a blessing or a curse? Will the women come to find a curse in your acceptance of their love? Is this the way to talk to a boy? But I am not talking to a boy. Your father was a full-fledged libertine when he was a year older than you are to-day, and he had destroyed the happiness of more than one home before he was twenty. He had run away with another man's wife before he ceased to be legally an infant, and he had dissipated most of his fortune within two years. Do you want to know something of the Berkeleys of Stratton, from whom you are descended? You will find it epitomised in the life of your grand-uncle. He did not, however, run away with another man's wife. It was his own wife who saved her life by running away from him. What turn will the family frenzy take in your case, my lord? That is a question which I may live to see answered. Will you be Byron the Bad or Byron

the Mad? Will you strike out some original course of wickedness for yourself or be content to go to perdition on the old well-trodden track laid down by your ancestors? I suppose they found it cheaper in the long-run to make a straight road for family use to perdition. They must have begun it early, for the more recent members of the family travelled on it with delightful smoothness and rapidity, whether they went down to Avernus in the family chariot or, like commoners, on foot. However you may travel, my lord, take my advice and don't let our patron Beelzebub know that a Byron with a graft of the Gordon frenzy is at hand, or you will find yourself bombarded by a heavier blunderbuss than was used against you to-night. He will have some compassion on the souls in his charge."

Byron had sprung from his chair. His face had become whiter as the man proceeded with his speech. When it came to an end the boy found himself with his fingers straining round the handle of a knife. He looked at the blade, and then flung the knife into a corner of the room. He pointed a quivering finger at the man who had been speaking, but he could not himself speak for some time, so strongly moved was he. Then he cried, still pointing his finger at the man—

" You are he—you are he—you are the devil himself to speak to me as you have spoken. You are part of this night of weirdness and wonder. It was all read to me years ago—the stars that fell from heaven—portents of the spirit that mocks and lures to destruction. You appeared by my side out of the blackness and you took the semblance of my father in this room."

" That proves it—the semblance of an angel of light," cried the man, throwing himself back in his chair with roars of laughter.

" I have eaten and drunk with you, but that does not bind me to you," continued the boy when he

had recovered from the interruption. "Bind me to you, if you have the power. Try your spells upon me, if you are all powerful. I defy you."

The man was clearly amused. He lay back smiling curiously—interestedly.

"It is a page from one of our modern stories of gloom," he said. "The proud hero defies the mysterious stranger. But the defiant youth pays his humble servant too high a compliment, and in doing so treats Lucifer somewhat scurvily. What! to suggest that the Prince of Darkness would put himself to the trouble of coming for a Byron and of failing to know that Byron would go to him as fast as his legs and his appetites would carry him! Fie, my lord; Lucifer is no fool, whatever he may be. You traduce the patron of our house."

He was still leaning back in his chair smiling while he fingered the stem of a wineglass. Suddenly he straightened himself—he leant forward, and with his eyes fixed on the boy's face his smile vanished.

"Lord Byron," he said, in a measured way, "whatever people may say of you in the days to come, when you have your liberty, you will always have my sympathy, for I know that your destiny is not in your own hands. Just as a man's body inherits the strength and the weakness of his parents, so does his nature. He can no more change the nature that has been transmitted to him than one can gather figs from thistles—grapes from thorns. The Byrons are thistles and the Berkeleys are thorns, and they will never be otherwise. The fools of the world lift up their hands in blame of both. That is their folly. Does any moral blame attach to a thorn bush in that it does not produce grapes, or to the thistle—perhaps in your case the Scotch Gordons are symbolised by the thistle?"

Crash went the table, with the glass and china that it bore. Byron had put both his hands down to it and overthrown it in the direction of the man,

who was leaning an elbow on the cloth while lifting a lecturing finger at the boy. Crash went the table, and crash went his chair behind him, as he turned round in a fury and made for the door, amid the roars of laughter of the man. He turned for a moment and looked back. The man was lying in his chair holding up a wineglass that he had saved from the wreck of the table.

"I was wrong ! I was wrong !" he cried. "I find that it is possible to save a unit from the destruction of a whole brittle family. Take courage, Byron ! Take courage !"

But Byron had shut the door with a bang, and was already outside the cottage, and making his way by the light of an exquisite dawn to the path which glimmered among the trees. He still heard faintly the laughter of the man whom he had left in the room. Before he had gone far he looked back. He failed to see the cottage. It had disappeared as completely as if it had been drawn by a pencil of mist upon the slate-dark background of trees.

He wiped his forehead, standing his ground. His first shock was succeeded by a feeling of exultation. He felt that he had got the better of a powerful adversary—that he had succeeded in freeing himself from a bondage that other people had found unrelaxing ; and he had done this without the aid of any of those texts or the crossing of the air with any of those symbols that had been found necessary by the heroes of the stories of similar mysterious encounters which he had read.

"I defied him," he muttered. "I defied him and I hurled his mocking words back at him ! I showed him that I feared him not, and it was not in his power to lure me to return to him. Ha, I showed him that I was his master—not he mine ! and here I stand still, not fleeing from him, should he not be satisfied with the result of our meeting—I stand—I defy him !"

He had his back against a tree, and he was shaking his fist in the direction, or what he fancied was the direction, of the grove that had surrounded that mysterious cottage. From the days of his childhood by the side of his Scotch nurse his imagination had been appealed to by the superstitious and the supernatural. All those elements of the religion of so many of the people in whose midst his childhood was passed, were assimilated by him until they had become part of his life. Among a people who talked of second sight and burnt witches in batches ; who looked daily for the realisation of the lurid pictures of the Apocalypse ; whose religion materialised the Spirit of Evil and cherished the result as fervently as it did its incarnation of the Divine—such an imagination as Byron possessed was ever active. He could not but believe in the reality of the Demon and the Dragon whose visitations were whispered about in every chimney-corner in Aberdeen. When to the oral evidence of the existence of these things there were added many excursions into the supernatural which appeared in the sombre pages of the most popular of those English romancers who preceded the sun-burst of Scott, the seriousness of the impression produced upon his receptive mind by the incidents of the night may be taken for granted.

For the time he overlooked the fact that the figure which had appeared by his side out of the blackness had been addressed by name by the very practical caretakers of Newstead. It was long before his exultation at having faced and escaped from the artful Archfiend himself decreased. He remained leaning against the tree in the dawn, asking himself what he had been expected to do when he had yielded to the Tempter's lure and had partaken of supper in that mysterious cottage. Was he to have used the knife against himself in response to the taunts of the Tempter ? Was he to have taken the cus-

tomary oath to assign his soul to the Pit in exchange for some immediate material advantage?

He put the question aside as unnecessary in the circumstances, though undeniably interesting from certain standpoints. Whatever the object of the temptation had been, he had resisted it. He had saved his soul alive, and the baffled Fiend had probably found it prudent, though the boy was not certain on this point, to vanish in a flame the moment his back was turned, while the cottage, which had been conjured out of the black air of the night, had doubtless vanished into the grey air of the dawn.

He felt glad to lean for some time longer against his tree. The truth was that he felt deadly tired. He had walked more during the night than he had ever done within the same time, and his deformed foot could now barely support him. The night had been an exciting one, from the moment that he had quarrelled with his mother at dusk and had sought to free himself from her thraldom. He had witnessed a miracle in the skies such as he had never heard of being seen before on earth, and he had been several times in jeopardy of his life. If a branch of the trees through which his runaway horse had crashed, had struck him on the head, it would have killed him, and if the animal had stopped less suddenly at the gate he would have been thrown head foremost against the wall and his brains would have been scattered upon the road.

Then there was the comical crisis of the pouting pursed mouth of the blunderbuss—comical, but on the verge of a tragedy. The ridiculous mouth of the thing looking out of the window was open like a yokel's in expectancy of a comedy, but the thing might have witnessed a tragedy.

And then came this last.

He remembered how the flame from the candle had illuminated the face, showing how like it was to the picture which hung over the mantelpiece in

his mother's house. He had seen her stand before it railing against the man whose likeness it was—the scamp who had reduced her to beggary, and then wailing before it, calling him her beautiful husband—the darling of her life. It was undoubtedly a devil's trick—that appearing with the features of his father.

Suddenly a cold thought came to him—it was a dreadful possibility; but he had heard a Scotch story of the curse laid upon an evil “light o' love”—that was the Scotch name for him—his disembodied spirit finding no rest, but being forced to wander in awful disquiet from place to place, appearing to those whom he had known in life, and ever being the precursor of misfortune. People had not been reticent in his presence on the subject of the delinquencies of his father; and his mother had been the least reticent of all. Could it be possible that his light-o'-love father was undergoing the penalty assigned to his type—that his latest visit was to the inheritance of his son?

With the terror of this question upon him he moved away from the shadowy trees in the direction of the carriage-drive, which was now fully apparent in the dawn. By the time he had painfully worked his way to the entrance gates the world was fitfully awake. There was the autumn twittering of a robin on an elm, the quick, silent flight of a blackbird from the shrubbery, the scamper of a hare through the under-growth, the crowing of innumerable cocks from far and near, the shrill shriek of peacocks, and the constant cawing of the rooks, flying in slow, wavering flocks from the trees to the fields.

He stood at one of the pillars of the gates, looking over the broad country in front of him, and at the road running to right and left. It was a wretched moment for him. All the sense of exultation which had been with him a short time before had departed, giving place to a consciousness of humiliation. It was humiliating for the owner of the demesne behind

him, and the broad fields facing him, to stand outside those gates, not knowing whether he should take the road to the left or the road to the right. It was all the same to him which direction he took.

He had not gone more than half a mile before he was exhausted. He seated himself on the brink of the dusty green bank at the roadside to wait for the first vehicle that might come up. His vigil was not a long one. In five minutes he was asleep.

CHAPTER V

WHEN he next opened his eyes he found people bending over him—women and a man. The former were interested and sympathetic, the latter was peevish and protesting. A coach, with four big horses and a coachman to match, stood in the middle of the road.

But Byron was oblivious of all save only the face which was looking into his own. That face made a complete heaven for his eyes. It seemed to him at that moment (and ever after) that he had never had a delight in life that was not somehow associated with that face. He could see that the eyes were of the darkest blue of a pansy, and that the hair, which showed under the hood of the blue satin cloak and at the clasp under her chin, where a couple of little rings eddied into light, was brown, with a gold sheen upon it—bright, vivid, subtle, a marvel of richness. A strand of it fell close to his face when she stooped. He could have kissed it. . . . And her lips were parted, and her hand was holding one of his.

“For Heaven’s sake, child, resume your place in the coach,” came the petulant voice of the man. He was elderly. He spoke before he had quite completed a yawn, and he yawned before he had quite completed his sentence. “For Heaven’s sake, why all this pother about a gipsy’s brat? Can you doubt that he is aught else? Look at his jacket—the cast-off garment of a young gentleman. Was there ever such a girl? I sleep on my

legs. Madam, will you exercise your authority over your daughter, if you have any; I protest that I have none?"

"Mary, my dear, do you think that it is wise?" said the elderly lady with sweet, silver-haired meekness. She was doing her best to obey her husband without prejudice to the sympathy she felt for her daughter's investigations, and her own interest in the newly awakened boy.

"Of course it is wise—ask the Bishop," said the girl.

"Of course, to be charitable—but on the present occasion—he has certainly the loveliest eyes," said the mother.

"Loveliest fiddlesticks!" cried the man. "Lud! if every wayside adventurer had good eyes, every woman would become his good Samaritan!"

"I'm perfectly certain that he is young Byron—I said so at first," cried the girl, looking up.

"Ask him if he is Lord Byron," suggested the mother.

"The way to turn a plain vagabond into an impostor," said the man. "Oh, ask him, by all means. You are Lord Byron, my little man, is't not so?"

Byron was by this time fully awake. He got upon his feet, and in the act caught sight of his tatters—they were not improved by being rolled in the ditch. He hung his head, blushing with shame—all the more vividly when he saw the condition of his hands. The blood had congealed in their scratches.

The first step that he took caused the elder lady to exclaim—

"Ah, 'tis indeed young Byron!"

Her daughter made a little motion with her hand, and looked meaningfully at her mother.

"My poor boy! how did you come here?" she asked quickly. "I knew at once that you were Byron.

That was why we stopped the coach. Of course you are Byron."

"Oh, of course—quite as a matter of course," said her stepfather. "Think of a good tale to account for your having made your bed in a ditch, my little man. You did it from choice, I am sure, my lord."

Byron looked at him without a word.

"You have been thrown from your horse; tell us how it happened," cried the girl.

"Highwaymen. You know that you were warned only a week ago, my dear," said her mother, turning to the man, a tone of triumph in her voice.

"For Heaven's sake, give the lad a crown, and send him back to his caravan," was the reply.

"Don't mind papa," said the girl. "He is fast asleep; he is only talking in his dreams; that was ever his way. Just tell us that you are Lord Byron, and all will be well."

"I fancied that even in my present state I bore with me a token that could not be misread," said the boy, looking at his foot. "I am Lord Byron; but I did not ask you to stop your coach to pity me, or to insult me. I have the honour to wish you good-morning."

He bowed and put up his hand to remove his cap. He seemed surprised and mortified that no cap was on his head.

The elderly gentleman raised his eyebrows.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed, and now he raised his hands. He crossed the road from the coach door, at which he had been standing, to the boy, saying quite genially—

"How i' the name of Heaven?—my unfortunate lad! Now, who could have guessed? I dare affirm that you thought me an insolent vulgarian for my remark. But could you see yourself! Is't possible that you passed the night in the—on the roadside? Ah! 'tis not possible!"

He spoke in the manner of the eighteenth century,

and it sounded old-fashioned, even in the first ten years of the nineteenth. It suggested leisure and deliberation ; it had nothing of the bustle of the pantaloons which were just coming into vogue.

“ I lost my horse,” said Byron, making a bold attempt to take a short cut through his adventures of the night. “ He bolted with me and killed himself at a gate.” All the party looked across the ditch into the field. “ No, not here—at the other side of the grounds, I think it must have been.”

“ And you were hurt ? You must have been hurt, or you would have been able to walk up to the Abbey,” said the elder lady.

“ No, I was not hurt. I was thrown among trees, and escaped with a scratch or two. I have been at the Abbey. I did not know that it had been let to strangers. I found the doors closed in my face.”

“ Lord Grey de Ruthven is your tenant, and he has been out of the country for the past six months,” said the gentleman.

“ So that you were forced to pass the night on the roadside ? Oh, my boy ! you must be starving,” cried the elder of the ladies. The younger was equally compassionate. Among women compassion exists at all ages ; with men, it exists only during the first few years of fatherhood, when it exists at all.

“ I was not in such straits as that,” said Byron. He thought it better not to go into particulars. He had noticed that the fat coachman was slumbering on the box, and that the gentleman was once more yawning, not angrily, as before, only with polite weariness.

The golden girl saw her stepfather fingering the handle of the coach door. She took Byron’s hand, saying—

“ There is only one thing to be done. We are your

kinspeople, the Chaworts of Annesley. This unkind gentleman is Mr. Clarke, my stepfather. It is only a few miles to the Hall. You will come with us. We can provide you with a more comfortable bed than you will find on any roadside, and send you to—to your destination, during the day. Is not that our best plan, papa ? ”

“ What you please—what you please, my dear ; any plan that means a move toward our beds is the best plan,” replied the gentleman, wearily. He had plainly reached that stage of weariness which means indifference to the most preposterous suggestions, if only they do not exclude an immediate repose.

Byron himself was not far removed from this stage ; but even if he had been sufficiently alert to be able to protest his unwillingness to put anyone to any trouble on his account, there would still have remained in the circumstances in which he found himself a sufficient counterweight to any mere considerations of politeness. He had looked into Mary Chaworth’s face. He was in her hands. She could have led him anywhither—even back to his mother.

“ How kind you are ! ” he muttered. “ But I am unfit— ”

He glanced at the satin and lace of the ladies’ dresses—they were both in evening toilet, with satin-hooded wraps—and then at his own rent raggedness.

“ In the name of Heaven enter the coach,” said Mr. Clarke, thrusting his phrase forward so as to obstruct the boy’s excuses. If they were to begin the fencer’s play of punctilio, they might be on the roadside for half an hour. Mr. Clarke felt that his wife’s daughter would have done well to remain asleep among the cushions of the coach, instead of sending her eyes abroad into the dawn in search of casual occupants of ditch dormitories. But she had discovered a kinsman who could not be neglected—that was the worst of it ; young Byron, confound

him ! could not be left in his ditch. The most elementary principles of hospitality—drat them!—insisted on his rescuing a cousin from so deplorable a position.

But to stand on punctilio—punctilio at five o'clock in the morning. . . .

“Get in—get in—get into the coach !” cried the gentleman, and Byron, breathless before this pitch-fork hospitality, went headlong into the vehicle after the ladies. He fancied that he saw a meaning twitch of the eyebrow on the part of that footman who was at the handle of the door in the direction of the other, who stood just behind Mr. Clarke. The twitch suggested “What next ?”

But within the coach all was cushioned courtesy—no scrupulous drawing aside of silk skirts to avoid the assault of his boots; no avoidance of the unsavoury grass that still clung to him, but without sufficient tenacity, through his contact with the roadside bank. He was helped by friendly gloved hands when he stumbled over a twisted mat on the floor, and then he found himself among the cushions opposite to the girl.

She hoped that he remembered having met her long ago—how long ago was it ?—he was only a child—it must have been a long time ago—four or five years.

“For goodness’ sake, child, cease your chatter,” cried her stepfather, when the coachman had awakened, and the horses began to scent their stables. “What, are we to be fully aroused for the day before we have quite composed ourselves for the night ? Cannot you see that Byron has no mind to pit his voice against the clatter of the high road ? Give him an opportunity to recover himself from the effects of your sudden pounce upon him.”

The girl lifted up her hands in a very pretty posture of protest.

“Dear Cousin Byron, do you really think of me

as a hawk, and of yourself as a leveret on the roadside?" she asked.

But her cousin could only blush in the corner of his seat. His mind was not blushing, however; he saw the girl's exquisite hair shining between the outlines of her face and the quilted lining of her hood—it was like the aureole of a Madonna; and his lips were parted to tell her that the bird which she appeared to him to be when he had opened his eyes and seen her stooping over him was not a hawk, but a dove, silver white, with the sheen of gold on its shapely head. His eyes fell, and his lips closed, biting a sigh in twain. He could not speak.

"The boy has sense," said Mr. Clarke. "We shall be at home in ten minutes. Let us spend the time in composing ourselves."

"I have been doing nothing else since the last dance, dear papa," said the girl.

"The last dance?" murmured her stepfather. "With you there is no last dance—your life is one perpetual dance. When you are not patting the measure with your feet, you are singing the theme with your voice."

"Is that all?" said she with a pout. "Ah, my dear papa, if you could but see my heart."

"Jigs, my dear, jumping jigs—that is the measure to which your heart dances. The linnet is its jigmaker."

"Thank you, sir; I am quite content. I was afraid that you were going to suggest the jay or the woodpecker," said she.

"They are too regular for you, miss; but I might have thought of the owl or the night-jar—they are birds of the night, needing no sleep, and fancying that no one else needs any. That is my last word."

He put himself back among his cushions and closed his eyes, while the girl made the daintiest mock of him imaginable.

Byron listened to their exchange of phrases, with envy of the man's position that entitled him to provoke the girl to respond. During their thistledown archery a vision of a relationship more delightful than any he had thought possible to exist had opened up before him. The pretty tyranny of the girl, before which the father bent his head with a submission that had in it something of humour, as well as pride—her fearless raillery of him, and his good-humoured replies, were a revelation to the boy of the happiness which could exist in a family.

He had never before had such an experience as this. He had a very faint recollection of his father (though it grew more distinct as time went on, and he heard more about him), but he had had the amplest experience of his mother to confirm him in his remembrance of a bickering in their Scotch lodgings, which ended in the departure of his father and the exultant clamour of his mother. He knew what was his mother's nature. It had caused him to look forward to his return to her house for his holidays with trepidation. It had compelled him to leave her house at Southwell six hours before. His experience of domesticity had led him to think of it only in the light of an endless brawl. But now he looked at the daughter's face opposite to him, and saw that the smile which had brightened it all the time that she was playing with words as with snowballs, with her stepfather, had not yet faded from it ; he glanced furtively at the face of the gentleman beside her, and he saw that he too was smiling, though with closed eyes.

He lost something by confining his observation to those two faces ; he should have looked at the elderly lady who sat beside her daughter. She was looking at him. He would have seen in her eyes something sweeter, tenderer, deeper than he found in the expression which lingered upon the faces of the father and the daughter.

But what he saw gave him a thought which never

quite left him—the thought that he had missed something in life—that something, which his quick understanding told him was nearest to the Divine in life, could never be his. It never was his; he attained only unhappiness and immortality.

CHAPTER VI

“WE have five hours till breakfast time ; how shall we put in the time ? ” cried Mary Chaworth, when she was standing under the oak beams of the entrance to Annesley Hall. Her mother had given instructions to a servant regarding a room for Byron, and Mr. Clarke was refreshing himself at a table on which decanters stood. The moment the girl spoke he laid down his glass and raised his hands.

“She means it too ! ” he cried. “She is ready for another dance — one that will last till breakfast time. Leave her side, my Lord Byron, she is dangerous, I tell you.”

“I have it,” said Mary. “Cousin Byron will give us a full account of his adventures since the evening. Can you compress the tale into the space of four hours, cousin ? ”

“Not to do justice to the theme,” said Byron. He could not remain shy when such a girl was rallying him and had called him cousin. “Æneas took some days over his story, did he not ? and yet he had only to relate how Troy was captured.”

“His story took some days in the telling, but I affirm that I took several months learning to read it,” said Mr. Clarke.

“He told it in poetry, and embellished it, I am sure,” said Mary.

“We shall put Byron into the Swan Room,” said Mrs. Clarke, when she had conferred with the housekeeper — hastily summoned — at a door half hidden among swinging tapestry. He prepared to

follow Mr. Clarke's servant, who carried a lighted candle, which looked official, but absurd, for it was now broad daylight.

"Lud ! I had quite forgot that you were starving," said Mr. Clarke, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder. "You cannot go to bed without refreshing yourself."

But Byron affirmed that he had had an excellent supper only a few hours before. Everyone looked at him incredulously.

"I' faith, in that case you were not so badly treated as I supposed," said Mr. Clarke. "They let you enter Newstead after all ?"

Byron shook his head.

"I believe that his adventures would be more interesting than those of Æneas that such a fuss was made about," said Mary. "Tell me if you supped after the manner of King Nebuchadnezzar—in the fields—or under the beeches with the squirrels ?"

"He will tell us all after breakfast to-day," said Mrs. Clarke.

He began to feel himself something of a hero standing among these pleasant people who showed such interest in his welfare. He cherished the mystery of his supping place, shaking his head at every question that was put to him. He felt himself of some importance, until on his way to the staircase he faced a long mirror at the back of a jardinière. He started, blushed scarlet, and then burst into a laugh.

"A guy—who was there to tell me that I was such a guy ?" he cried. "To think of your taking me into the coach in such a state ! I knew, of course, that I was not exactly a dandy, but on the other hand—oh, a chimney sweep ! And none of you laughed ! not even at this coat !"

"Nay, we had not the heart to laugh at what was plainly so near its end," said Mary Chaworth. "I saw at a glance that it would last you to the end of your journey, if the horses were rapid."

She put a daintily poised forefinger and thumb upon one of the sleeves—he saw at once how like her hand was to a white dove descending upon his shoulder, fluttering for a moment with a fastidious droop before alighting—and toyed with one of the rents.

“The envious Casca,” she said, and Byron laughed.

“That were to assume that I am Cæsar,” said he.

“Ay, but ‘dead and turned to clay’—clay ‘tis on your jacket, sir, and I protest that it is pretty equally distributed over your body.”

“So I perceive,” said he. “And yet you did not laugh—you were able to recognise me lying on the ditch side! I shall never forget your condescension.”

Mr. Clarke was becoming impatient, to say nothing of the major-domo with the official candle-stick.

“I think that it would be well to defer compliments for an hour or two,” said he. “You will find that the blackbirds are not generous in the amount of sleep they allow to you at this hour of the morning.”

He was half-way up the first flight of stairs to where it branched off to right and left of the gallery before Byron had said his good-night to Mrs. Clarke and Mary.

The room to which he was conducted bore along the whole length of one of its sides a fine tapestry illustrating the story of Leda. The shutters were closed and candles were lighted in sconces on the wall, though their illumination seemed pale and sickly where the daylight streamed into the room through the slit where the folds of the shutters barely met. Byron, when he found himself alone, blew out the candles and opened the shutters and one of the windows, so that the room was flooded with sunshine, and the notes of the blackbirds and thrushes.

He seated himself at the window and indulged in a revel of thought. They came upon him with a rush, these thoughts—with the sound of winnowing

wings, with the clash of music, with bursts of sunshine. They sang in his ears the magic songs of Ariel ; they carried him away with them, supported on their wings, and left him, breathless and fevered, in strange places. They filled him with the yearnings of youth, the passions of manhood. They fired his brain with the ardour of a soldier. They led him up to the snow-peaks of mountains, down into the shadowy folds of valleys ; then on to the sea—the sea that taught him to sing of the pleasure of the pathless wilds—the rapture of the lonely shore—and then brought him to stray beside the still waters that reflected his star—the Star of Love. He was left standing by that tranquil deep, and the only light of his life was that which was shed by this star.

At other times this strange thraldom of thought had taken possession of him, driving him away from all the associations of boyhood, and leaving him most frequently in the depths of a wilderness, with a passionate, but undefined yearning in his heart. He could not understand what this force was, or what it meant, or why he alone should be subjected to it. He had shyly asked one or two of his schoolfellows what it meant, and they had laughed at him—even the most sympathetic. That was why he had felt that he only was made to suffer this thraldom. What did it mean ? he wondered. How was it that to him and him only the sea was articulate ? How was it that into his ear only the mountains spoke their message ? How was it that solitude became an oratorio to be heard by him only, in all its movements of splendour, and rapture, and tenderness, and devotion ? How was it that he alone could hear the passionate whisper of the Evening Star ?

He did not know what the voice was that called to him mysteriously—the voice which seemed to call to him alone. He could not understand that it was laid on him to interpret all that he heard for the benefit of the rest of the world who could not

hear ; and this was why he had a constant feeling of a longing unsatisfied—a passionate, vague yearning that seemed to him as vain as it was vague.

Once or twice he felt himself on the verge of comprehending the great secret. It was when he had read to him the story of the life of some of the prophets of the Bible. These men, who looked at the things of Nature around them and interpreted between them and the rest of the world, must surely have had mysterious moments such as his. And the poets—he had found in many great poems the very thoughts that had come to him at times. The poets had made their revelations to the world—he felt that to him they were no revelations : he had known them—felt them—before he had had a chance of reading the poets' songs. Still he never entertained the thought that he was a poet, or if the possibility ever occurred to him, it did not dwell with him.

But now as he sat at the open window and allowed himself to be carried away by those tumultuous thoughts of his, he had a feeling of such hopefulness as had never before been his companion in those wild, vague, unsatisfying excursions of his. He had a sense of a sympathetic ear being at hand, the ear of one who could listen and understand—one who would not merely stare and laugh as other people had done, chilling him into an abashed silence. He had a feeling that the girl whose face he had seen looking down upon his face when he had opened his eyes in the early dawn, would be able to tell him why it was that he had that strange yearning at heart every time that he saw a lark spring from the meadow and float to the very heaven, as it seemed, upon the music of its own making. Why was it that he felt that that bird sank to the earth again apparently satisfied, while he had come back from his fancy's flight with that yearning still upon him ? Why was it that he never heard the lark without envy ? Why was it that he could never leave the woods in

which a nightingale was singing, without feeling that somehow the nightingale knew the secret of his longings—that it had somehow solved the mystery which he failed to understand ?

Would she sympathise with him if he were to tell her that now and again a strange wistful longing to be able to sing took possession of him—to sing aloud what he felt on standing beside the sea—on sitting amid the populous loneliness of the green woods—on looking at the Star of Love which he loved to see hanging like a torch in the blue evening skies above a solitary mountain peak ?

He had a hope that she would understand these things which were a mystery to himself, and would, he knew, seem more mysterious still to any of his few friends whom he might approach when his heart was full. The mere dwelling upon the possibility of being able to talk to her, face to face—to tell her his dreams—his fancies—his longings, made him feel less lonely and less like one who is wandering in darkness and in doubt. So much joy came to him in anticipation it was not surprising that he should be led to ask himself if being with her was not the object of all his longings in the woods and by the sea. Was this the interpretation of the longing of the lark which it uttered in passionate song—this feeling which had now taken possession of him and brought him happiness because it brought him hope ? Was this feeling the theme of the nightingale ? Was it the lack of this sympathy that had driven him forth from the cold companionship of his life up to the moment when he had looked up to heaven and had seen it, seeing her face above his own ?

He could feel his heart beating tumultuously as a man's heart beats when on the threshold of the greatest mystery of life. He was in a fever of excited thought. He began pacing his room intermittently, making a dash in one direction and then stopping suddenly ; walking slowly with his hands behind

his head, and his head bent; standing at the open window drinking in the cool morning air, every breath of which was vibrant with song; and after a few moments that seemed passive, turning back to the room to stare at the glimmering god in the form of a swan in the tapestry of the wall, and at the white limbs of Leda.

Back again from the tapestry to his pacing of the room; but not for long. Passing the great bed with its tent-like drapery, he looked at it for a moment and then flung himself down upon the satin coverlet, weeping passionately, he knew not why.

He actually fell asleep in this position and remained sleeping for some time. He awoke suddenly and looked up as if dazed.

"She is here—she is here—under the same roof, and, having seen her, I shall never be without her again in the world. I shall never be lonely again while I live," he said in a whisper.

He sprang from the bed and stood in the middle of the room as if he had heard a sudden voice speaking to him—commanding him. With one hand pressed against his forehead he stumbled to a table where there was a Dresden china inkstand with a case of quills beside it, and a box of writing paper. He threw himself into the nearest chair, caught up a pen, dipped it, and began to scrawl feverishly. Scarcely pausing for an instant to find a word, he wrote and wrote for some minutes till the pen dropped from his fingers. Then he caught up the paper and read what he had written—he read in a whisper as if the page revealed a secret to him, and to him only.

I.

There be none of beauty's daughters
With a magic like to thee,
And like music on the waters
Is thy sweet voice to me;

When, as if its sound were causing
The charmed ocean's pausing,
The waves lie still and gleaming,
And the lull'd winds seem dreaming.

II.

When the midnight moon is weaving
 Her bright chain o'er the deep,
Whose breast is gently heaving
 As an infant's asleep;
So the spirit bows before thee,
To listen and adore thee,
With a full and soft emotion
 Like the swell of summer's ocean.

He read. The paper dropped from his fingers. He lay back in the chair and laughed. He was still laughing while he undressed himself; but before he fell asleep his pillow was wet with tears.

The secret had been revealed to him; not without tears.

CHAPTER VII

AND yet the first thought that came to him when he next awoke was that he should have to dress himself in an intolerably ragged suit of clothes. He had vivid recollections of the result of his glance at the mirror in the hall when going to the stairs. That was when everyone was sleepy, so that it scarcely mattered how he was dressed. But now the sunshine was streaming into the room, and in those clothes he would look like a gipsy vagrant.

In another moment, however, he had a sense of happiness ; tempered only by a slight misgiving. He remembered writing something—verses—there lay the sheet of manuscript on the floor, just where it had fallen, at the foot of the chair on which he had thrown his clothes ; and the thought that now came to him was : “ How will it stand the ordeal of the sunshine ? ” He was mindful of the sense of passionate delight—the sense of glory achieved—of the vague longing satisfied—that had been his when he had written those lines ; but would they stand the stress of being read in the sunlight ? Would he find that they were doggerel, or that he was a poet ?

He turned his head away from the paper on the floor, so that he should not be tempted to try to read a line that he had written. He had not the courage to get out of bed and read the page from first to last. And the moment that he turned his face to the wall, the thought that came to him was—

“ Whether I have written poetry or doggerel, I shall see her within the hour.”

Forthwith the thought of her and the thought of his achievement became so joined in his mind that they seemed to be, not two thoughts, but one. One seemed to be incomplete without the other. The two combined gave him the delight as of a search rewarded by the finding of a pearl of great price. The poetry had come only because he had been thinking of her. She had filled all his thoughts, and the poetry which had flowed from him had come from that fountain of thought, which was she.

The poetry was part of her. The inspiration had come from her.

It was this thought that gave him courage, and helped to banish his misgivings. The poetry could not but contain some element of worth, when she had been the origin of it.

He got out of bed and picked up the sheet of paper, and read the lines. They sounded quite new to him. While he remembered writing them all, he had no recollection of any single line.

A great joy came to him, making the blood flow more rapidly in his veins, and burn in his face. It seemed to him that, not only was the poetry his own, but that the girl was his own also, so closely had the two become associated in his mind. He felt that he had suddenly entered upon a heritage of a value that could not be reckoned by man. And so he had.

And he had been so nearly missing it all! He had set out from his mother's house at Southwell with the intention of entering into possession of his inheritance at Newstead, and when its doors were shut against him, he felt humiliated, as though the place had passed away from him for ever. He had actually lain down to sleep at the side of the ditch, like any vagrant, and lo! he had awakened for this—this sense of having achieved all that man could hope to achieve in this world—this sense of glory and rapture.

It was like a fairy story realised. He was the young prince who, being thrust out of his kingdom by strangers, was found asleep on the dusty roadside by a princess, who brought him to her palace, made him sit on the throne beside her, and endowed him with more than half her kingdom, and with all herself as well!

It took him some time to recover from the excitement that his vivid fancy had caused him, and to think of his actual position at that moment. He knew that the Chaworths were relations of his own—how far distant he could not tell. At any rate, it was sufficiently close to have made a visit from Mrs. Clarke and her daughter to his mother, obligatory, when they were in London several years before—while he was yet a child; and it was sufficiently distant to save the need for any exchange of visits between the two families when his mother came to live at Southwell—fourteen or fifteen miles from Annesley Hall. He recollects his mother's pointing out the entrance to the Hall to him when they drove past one afternoon during the previous summer. She had told him that the Chaworths, who were his cousins, lived there, and that they were too proud to own the relationship, though they had visited her in London.

He had thought no more about the Chaworths at that time, only reserving to himself the right to think that the ladies of the family showed a certain amount of wisdom and discrimination in refraining from pressing on his mother their claim to regard her as one of the family. He knew that no one had ever known his mother as a friend without living to regret it.

Young as he was, he had experience enough of his mother to refuse to accept the pride of the Chaworths as proved, on the evidence which she had brought forward to sustain her assertion. And now he was glad that he had not done them such an injustice. Pride? It did not show much pride on their part

to pick him up from the roadside and take him home with them in their coach, in spite of his rags and his begrimed condition.

And at this point of his reflections the weight of the thought that he had nothing to put on his limbs except those same rags, pressed him down into his bed again. He thought of pleading sickness—intolerable weariness—any excuse would be sufficient to save him from the intolerable humiliation of appearing before Mary Chaworth in those rags.

And then his door was knocked at, and Mr. Clarke's man entered the room with a portmanteau, and with Mr. Clarke's compliments to his lordship, to inform his lordship that he had given directions to one of the grooms to ride to Southwell for a fresh suit of his lordship's clothes, and the man had just returned with the portmanteau, and would his lordship care to rise, or prefer to have luncheon in his lordship's room.

His lordship's heart rose at the sight of his portmanteau and a knowledge of its contents. But as the man approached the bed, there came to his lordship the dreadful thought that he might see the sheet of paper on which the verses were scrawled. What if the valet were to get it in his hands and fling it away, believing it to be worthless! Byron had a man's dread of new valets. He felt very humble in the presence of Mr. Clarke's man, and he knew that he would be powerless to save the document from destruction if the man had a mind to destroy it.

He temporised with him in order to get the paper into his hands once more, and effectively concealed; but a strange valet is inexorable as Fate. He seems to perceive every attempt that may be made to compel him to keep his distance. His eyes are watchful. This man might have entered the room solely for the purpose of getting within reach of the manuscript. He would not leave the room to find out

what o'clock it was ; he had announced the hour to be half-past eleven. He would not even carry the portmanteau across the room to the small table where his lordship suggested it might be unpacked. There was a stand quite close to the bed, he explained quite respectfully. Would he be pleased to close the window, Lord Byron asked in despair. When the man went to the window his lordship threw the coverlet over the paper, and then suffered himself to be led to the dressing-room, where a bath was awaiting him.

When he returned to the bedroom, he found the manuscript neatly smoothed out and laid on the table, with a paper weight preventing the possibility of its being blown away by a draught. The valet was certainly a most valuable servant, and Lord Byron feared to meet his eyes for the rest of the morning.

But, clad in the attire for which Mr. Clarke had been thoughtful enough to send to Southwell, he felt a good deal less shy in making his appearance in the breakfast-room than he had been on his arrival at the hall. He had his thanks to offer to Mr. Clarke for his kindness in the matter of the portmanteau ; but Mary affirmed that he had looked infinitely more picturesque in his old clothes—yes, much more like a gipsy vagrant—than he did now, when he looked as commonplace as an ordinary English gentleman.

“ If that is so, it is a more complete disguise for me than the other,” said Byron. “ I sometimes feel as one might expect a gipsy vagrant to feel, but never as an English gentleman.”

“ You must possess something of the adroitness of the character in which you appeared when we came upon you, if you managed to sup within reasonable distance of Newstead,” said Mr. Clarke.

Byron felt that this was an invitation to him to narrate his adventures of the night ; but he did not

wish to run a chance of being thought a fool by talking about the cottage hidden among the trees of his park. He asked Mr. Clarke if there was not a man named Vince in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Clarke raised his eyebrows.

"I had not thought of Vince," said he. "You came upon Vince in the course of your adventures? But if you supped at his cottage, why did you not sleep there also?"

Byron showed himself to be ill at ease at the question, and Mrs. Clarke tactfully broke in on the conversation.

"If you were on the road shortly before midnight, you may be able to say if our people were talking nonsense when they affirm that the stars left their places in the sky and kept tumbling to and fro for an hour," said she.

"'Tis the rascals themselves who were doing the tumbling about, I dare swear," said her husband. "'Tis your drunken rogue who declares with vehemence that everyone about him—nay, the houses and the King's highway itself—are in a condition of melancholy instability."

"But last night the thing happened," said Byron. "I do not suppose that it ever took place in the world before, but I saw it with my eyes from the ridge of the hill near a windmill. The night was, as you know, very dark, and there was only a breath of air now and again."

"We should know: we were nearly stifled in the coach on our way to the Stapyltons' ball," said Mr. Clarke. "But you amaze me."

"I saw two stars moving side by side across the sky," said Byron; "and then, by slow degrees, the sky became alive with little trailing comets—some tiny as stars, others larger than any planet, and brighter—the whole universe seemed to be pulsating stars—flying, shooting, sparkling, quivering, glowing stars—a beautiful sight!"

"Amazing!" cried Mr. Clarke.

"And you could watch it without feeling sure that the world was coming to an end?" said Mary. "Why if I had had a glimpse of such a thing I should have—"

"Put off even the most ardent partner for your next dance—ay, for a quarter of an hour or so," said her father. "If the world were actually coming to an end, you would feel that you must increase the tempo of the waltz, or you would not be able to get through it in time. On my word, I believe that, if the news arrived during a ball that the world was coming to an end, some of you girls would reserve a dance or two on the chance of having as partner the strong angel seen by St. John."

"And if there was a Nottingham squire at hand, he would lose no moment in trying to get the better of the rider of the white horse by selling him another to make up a match pair to go in double harness," cried Mary. But at an exclamation of reproof from her mother, she hastened to ask her pardon.

"I did not mean to be irreverent, even for the sake of being in the company of papa," she said. "And what did you really think of that wonder, Cousin Byron?" she added, turning to the boy who had been interrupted in his narrative.

"Oh, Byron had only an idea that the stars were falling from the heaven to warn him that he would have a tumble before morning," laughed the father. "Now, is not that the truth, Byron?"

Byron laughed also—a little uneasily.

"I do not say that, for a moment, something like that—only for a moment, mind—afterwards, what I thought was, how paltry man is—what a humble place this world of ours is!" he said.

"Please do not say 'this world of ours,' my dear Byron," said Mrs. Clarke gently. "The earth is not man's, but God's—the earth and the fulness

thereof. We are only tenants at will. That should be the lesson of the stars."

"True, my dear, quite true," said her husband. "Our tenure is most insecure. Was not Byron thrown from his horse? When that could happen, where is stability to be found? By the way, how did it happen, Byron?"

Byron explained how the great meteor, breathing flame like a fiery flying dragon, and hissing its way through the sky, ending in a burst of celestial artillery, had been too much for the horse's nerves, and how, after carrying him with a rush through the trees that had turned his coat into rags, it had charged the gate and thrown him among the foliage that overhung the wall at Newstead. In his account of the blunderbuss practice of the butler-caretaker he did not spare himself; but he was careful not to touch upon his offended dignity. Somehow the attitude of sombre dignity which at night seems to be striking, bears quite another aspect when viewed over the cheerful expanse of a breakfast table, especially when a girl with a strong sense of the ludicrous is at one side, and a gentleman with a turn for sarcasm is at the other. He knew that they would not have laughed had he told them how he pulled the hall bell imperiously, and then commanded the attendance of the servants by the announcement, "I am Lord Byron"—no, they would not have laughed; they would have laboriously refrained from laughter, and that would have been still harder for him to bear. He spoke of the martial weapon with the negro lips at the window, and then of the timely arrival of Mr. Vince, and of the armistice which had been arranged by the interposition of this tactful neutral. Then he paused.

"You mentioned that you supped at the cottage," said Mr. Clarke. "Would it be too curious on my part were I to ask you why you preferred the roadside to Vince's sofa?"

"No, no ; that would be like looking a gift horse in the mouth," said Mary. "No, we should be quite content with the course of circumstances which gave us a chance of meeting and greeting our cousin, without seeking to pry into first causes."

She looked smilingly toward Byron, but the eyes that met hers were not smiling ; they were adoring ; she was conscious of a little shock, so expressive were they of deep feeling—more than that—of rapture. She had a maiden's fright for a moment—half a dozen quick heart beats ; and a quick indrawing of breath. She had never before seen such an expression in human eyes—so beautiful—so full of tenderness—of passionate devotion.

And then Byron looked down, his long lashes falling on his cheeks, and the curls that had been on his forehead slipping down almost to his eyebrows. His face was glowing, his sensitive white skin being so transparent as to show the suffusion beneath.

"I have no doubt that Vince was as sardonic as usual," said Mr. Clarke. "He would not be likely to miss the opportunity of affronting the representative of the Byrons. We will not ask you if you found his insolence at last unendurable, my boy ; if you did, you only followed the example of everyone who has come in contact with the man."

"This is what happened," said Byron. "I had no idea who the man was—how could I ever have heard his name ? Indeed, I felt sympathy for him when he told me of his position ; I was prepared to make allowances ; but he said too much for anyone to bear. How could I have any respect for my grand-uncle ? I did not mind greatly what he said about him, but I could not hear a stranger speak as he did of my own father—I could not hear him assure me of the certainty of my going headlong to perdition, because of the sins of my ancestors. It

may have been foolish of me, but looking at him—seeing his curious likeness to my father—I felt for the moment that I was in the presence of some power of evil—something with a horrible skill in spells—I have heard of them in Scotland, though some people say they do not exist."

"And so you thought it prudent to get away while there was yet time?" said Mr. Clarke. "You are not to blame, and assuredly we here are not likely to blame you, since, as Mary said, your contretemps in the cottage was the means of making us acquainted—of course, we must have come together before long, being kinsfolk; but for the shortening of that space of time we are really grateful to Mr. Vince. He will find himself run through the vitals some day by making too free use of that venomous tongue of his. He speaks vitriol. I have heard it said that he writes for the reviews into the bargain."

"So bad as that?" said Mary.

"Perhaps I slander him; but that is general report," replied her stepfather. "He was established in the cottage by your grand-uncle, and provided with a small competency. He is said to be educated."

"He took no trouble to find out where I went when I left him," said Byron. "I had only gone thirty or forty yards away from the place when I turned to look once more at it. It had disappeared. You should have heard the way he laughed when he lay back in his chair and heard what I had to say. You would not think me a fool for fancying that he was a demon."

"Perhaps he fancied that you were one when he heard all that you had to say," remarked Mary slyly. "But how could the cottage disappear? Is the man really in league with the Evil One?"

"It may only be with the editor of the *Quarterly*; but that would be sufficient grounds for the sup-

position. Of the two, I think that I should prefer the—well, I will not say which monster of the two," said Mr. Clarke.

It appeared that the *Quarterly Review* had taken up a different stand from that of Mr. Clarke in discussing the Westminster election.

And all this time no question was asked of Byron respecting his reasons for suddenly leaving his mother's house, nor had a word been spoken on the subject of his return to Southwell. He somehow had a feeling that everyone suspected the truth. There were very few people in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Byron who remained in ignorance of the quality of her temper.

Byron himself was not greatly concerned about his mother; he would have been quite content to pay a long visit to his kinsfolk; but his mother was greatly concerned about him. She arrived at Annesley Hall early in the afternoon, driving the fourteen miles from Southwell in a decayed chariot which she had bought for a trifle at a sale. The horses were such as might be expected to deal tenderly with the vehicle. They were borrowed (with the coachman) from a friendly farmer, who looked forward to a renewal of his lease on easy terms when Mrs. Byron's son should enter on his inheritance.

Could there have been a more devoted mother? She threw her arms round her beloved boy and held him close to her ample form, her beady eyes showing all white while she turned them toward the ceiling—exclamations soaring from the hollows of motherly huskiness into a quavering falsetto of maternal emotion! Her boy—her beloved Byron—what a night she had passed! Would anyone be cruel enough to blame her? Mrs. Clarke knew what 'twas to be a mother. Only a mother could understand a mother's feelings. And when Farmer Fuggle had talked to Miller Rankin over the cap which he had found among the trees at Ash Knoll, they brought it to her in the early morning

to ask her if she could recognise it as his lordship's—and before they had left the house, Farmer Britain had come with an account of his lordship's horse, dead, with a broken blood-vessel, at the gate—was it strange that she was on the verge of distraction?

Again Mrs. Clarke was appealed to in the sacred name of mother.

So the detestable comedy of questions that were not meant to be answered—of upturned eyes of grotesque gratitude to heaven, and to Mr. Clarke for having relieved her horrible suspense through the agency of a groom asking for a portmanteau—of rapturous, bubbling kisses sprawling over the unhappy son's cheek, went on; and the raucous accent of the Highland Gordons stamped with clattering feet from phrase to phrase, and the small, fat face became redder and fatter, not without a suspicion of beads of dew, for with such there is no such sudorific as emotion. She was an emotional gymnast; an emotional acrobat, who turned and twisted and gyrated to excess, believing that she accomplished all that she meant to accomplish—believing that she was drawing tears from all eyes that watched her, because tears were in her own. She was thoroughly sincere—for the moment—and completely ridiculous.

Her son, struggling to be released from her sudden embrace, knew that everyone in the room was inwardly laughing, though not a facial muscle moved. His mother would not let him stir; she was well aware of the fact that he was a part of the picture. In the group entitled "The Return of the Prodigal," the son is an important figure. She could not spare her darling Byron, whom she had attacked the day before with a pair of tongs, and then with the more formidable weapon, her tongue. Between tongue and tongs her beloved son, who, she now thanked Heaven (with circulating eyeballs), was spared to her, had had some exciting moments; but then he had power to fly,

whereas now he was held to a billowy bosom, and compelled to participate in the undulations of its rapture, as a shallop sways in the control of the waves.

At last the tempest died away in the usual fashion, with a red-faced sunset, and an occasional sough and sob of subsidence, and a quick-passing squall with a smart rain of tears.

And still no one at the table so much as smiled. Byron had never been among such well-bred people. He was mindful of the "Whisht, wumman!" and the "Dinna mak' a fule o' yersel'," with other frank recommendations, which had been wont to greet her emotional excesses at Aberdeen; for in Aberdeen there was much frankness, and good manners simply mean dissimulation. He tried to believe that Mary and her mother did not know all—that they had, by some singular accident, failed to hear what everyone else had heard respecting his mother's temper; but in a moment the absence of all expression on their faces told him that they knew nearly as much as he did. He seated himself in a window, and stared out at the gardeners sweeping up the fallen leaves, while his mother was partaking of cake and wine, flinging herself, so to speak, upon Mrs. Clarke, with a complaint about the difficulty of obtaining servants in Southwell, with instances of ingratitude and insolence—with statistics of those who had forsaken her service within a single month—some within a single day—one within an hour.

This was dreadful; but before his mother had gone back to her chariot, it was settled that he was to extend his visit to Annesley until it was time for him to go back to Cambridge.

The whole house seemed to utter a sigh of relief when the foolish woman disappeared—a round, red face peeping, with a strain upon an apoplectic neck, from the window of the vehicle, and then suddenly popping into obscurity.

In less than half an hour, Mary Chaworth had made Byron forget that he had a mother in whose presence the best-intentioned son could not be neutral when she was determined to obtain recognition as an absurdity.

CHAPTER VIII

SHE understood him from the first. She seemed, by exercise of that sympathy which with some women is an instinct, to be aware of all that was in his heart—his sensitiveness, his pride, his passion to be distinct from other people, and not only to be distinct, but to be distinguished as well—his restlessness, his rebellion against the existing order of things in the world, if that which seems to be wholly without order may be so termed. She scarcely needed that he should confess anything to her, though the first day that they were together he was confessing to her as he had never confessed to anyone else in the world, his doubts, his aspirations (some of them), his hatreds. She knew by instinct that he had never had a chance of talking freely to any woman before—possibly never to any man either. That was why he was so shy, and appeared to be ill at ease in the presence of strangers. She felt sure that he had once or twice before been momentarily confidential, and had got laughed at in consequence, and this was quite true. She knew that he had never been so happy in all his life as he was when by her side in the garden, on horseback, in the music-room. She sometimes wondered if she herself had ever been so happy.

Of course, he was as a brother to her—that was the thought in which this girl enwrapped herself as with a robe of cold satin. How could he be otherwise than a brother to her—a young brother, making the most of his holidays? He was two years younger than she was, and that meant, she thought, fully ten

in experience of the world. He had scarcely met a dozen people in the course of his life ; he had never met half that number of people in his own position in the world ; but she had met hundreds. She had had the experience of refusing four offers of marriage within the first year of her leaving the schoolroom ; she was the sole heiress of three magnificent properties. It never occurred to her that it was possible for a boy of sixteen to be a man at heart, and in the knowledge of the heart of man—in thought, in passion. How could it occur to her that the boy with whom she was associating on a footing of the most delightful friendship was the one boy of a century ? —that he knew by instinct more than all other men had learned by experience—more than the majority of men learn during the whole of their lives ?

She could not know this. More than once she was startled by his giving expression to a thought that was very different from any that would be likely to come into a boy's mind. Sometimes it was a thought that seemed to have been inspired by a cynical observance of the act of a public man, sometimes one that seemed to come from a mocking spirit, which was never very far away from him. But more often she was startled by the perfect beauty of an idea that seemed to flash across his mind, and be uttered by him as though he were not responsible for it. A moment after such an utterance he would flush as if he were as greatly surprised as she was at the idea which had come to him.

Once she said, looking at him in a puzzled way—

“ I should like to know if you speak from memory, Cousin Byron, or if these thoughts simply come to you. Will you tell me ? ”

He flushed rosier than before, and replied, not without a stammer—

“ I should not like to do any great man the injustice of suggesting that my ideas were taken from him.”

There was a long and rather uneasy silence between them before Mary said—

“I wonder how do poets begin.”

He looked down to the ground. They were sitting on an old Italian marble seat in the shadow of the terrace at Annesley.

“How do poets begin?” he said. “I suppose they begin as babies, like other human beings. Wasn’t there one of them who talked of lisping in numbers?”

“Yes, but how did he lisp in numbers?” said she.

“He tells us, ‘for the numbers came,’ ” replied Byron.

“But why did they come to him?”

“He says they came—that was because he wished to disclaim all responsibility for them. He wished someone else to be blamed for them.”

“Have you ever tried to put an idea into verse, Cousin Byron?”

He was now like any peony. He tried to laugh at the very notion of such a thing, but his attempt was a very bad one. He stammered, and his stammering was to her a confirmation of her suspicion.

“You have written? Oh, tell me how you began,” she cried, laying a hand upon one of his, which rested on the back of their seat. He had been idly following with his fingers the course of the marble carving. “Tell me how you began, you dear boy,” she said again, pressing his hand affectionately.

He turned to her suddenly, his face crimson, and his eyes shining. He tried to speak, but his voice had become husky. It was her hand that was held by his now, and she felt how his was trembling—no, it was not so much trembling as it was quivering. It became as hot as fire over her own for an instant; then he plucked it away from hers, and turned his face from her.

“What!” she cried. “Have I said anything to hurt you, Byron? Do not think for a moment that I was mocking you. Do think that I asked you a question in all seriousness.”

He turned to her again with a laugh, but in an instant his eyes fell before her surprised look. The long lashes seemed to throw a still deeper shadow over his cheeks. His head bent forward until he was able to rest his chin in the hollow of his hand, his elbow being on his knee.

"It came to me when you came to me," he said in a low voice. "I did not know what it meant until that morning when you brought me here." I did not know why at times I should feel as if I were incapable of seeing things as they are—as other people see them—why I should not stand under the stars without having a hundred fancies about them—every conceivable fancy about them except that they were stars—why I should never be able to stand looking at a purple sunset without feeling that it meant much more to the world than to tell us that the day was at an end. Why should I, and I only, see something beneath everything that I saw—something that it was not—tell me that, Mary?"

"I can tell you—I can tell you," she said. "But you did not know?"

"I knew nothing except the trouble of it—the torture of it," he cried. "I puzzled myself daily and nightly trying to find a way of satisfying the vague longing which I felt for—for—I knew not what. I felt as if this life were a nightmare. You have had nightmares in which you tried your best to speak—to shout, but could not? I seemed to be in the thrall of such a dream. I had a longing to sing with the things around me that were singing in my ears—to shout with the shouting sea—but I could not. Sometimes I felt, when in the hold of that tumult of fancies, some dragging me in one direction, others in another, that I was being made a fool of by my imagination; but ever that striving after something vague—that desire to grasp what was intangible as a dream remained with me."

"You did not know that you were a poet," said the

girl gently, but her eyes were full of light. "Have you found out the truth?—I know that it is the truth."

"I found it out only on the morning of my coming here," he said. "I had seen you—I had talked with you. I had opened the window, after passing through the strange experiences of that night. In a moment I found myself in the midst of these phantom fancies, and, as before, that overwhelming desire—it had never before seemed to be the passion that I found it at that time—a passion to sing what I felt—to join in the morning song of Nature, which made the air pulsate with passion, took possession of me. The whole world had become one song to me as I knelt at my window—everything was singing what it felt, while I—I felt, but failed to sing, and yet I knew that I was but part of that great soul of Nature which was living beneath my eyes and in my ears. I felt. I do not know how it was I found myself at the table; but I was at the table with a pen in my hand. I did not know what words were coming—I felt like an interpreter who writes down what someone says in a language which he understands, but does not know what the next word will be. What I wrote did not seem to come from myself, but I had the sensation of singing—singing—singing all that I felt, and for the first time I knew that this was what I had striven after—yearned after so vaguely—to sing. And when I had sung I felt satisfied—at last—at last! I threw myself on my bed and slept—satisfied for the first time—I had penetrated the mystery."

His face was flushed and his eyes were flashing. He was steadyng himself on his feet by grasping the carved top of the marble bench.

And the girl was equally carried away. Her face, too, was roseate; and her eyes were bright, but with the tears that suffused them. Her hands were clasped, her lips were parted; she was breathing rapidly.

The words which she spoke she uttered in a whisper that had something of awe in it.

"Poet—poet!" she said. "I knew it long ago. How could anyone who had seen you—known you for a day—fail to perceive the truth?"

"But no one has ever known me—you are the only one to whom I could speak—who would not think me a fool," said he. "It was my seeing you that saved me. You were kind—sympathetic. You understood, and you understand more than I have told you. That is what I felt when I wrote. I felt that I should never again be alone in the world as I had been up to that moment; and that was the first song that I sang. It should have been altogether a song of joy; but somehow, when I read it later in the day, I found that there was a note of sadness in it. Why should that plaintive note creep into it? There was no sad thought in my heart. How could there be any, unless—unless—"

He seated himself once more, and now his eyes were turned away from her.

"You will let me read it?" she said. "It is a right that you cannot deny. Do you not think that I am proud of it?"

He laughed uneasily.

"Of course you are to read it," he said. "You may be proud of it. Somehow, I cannot think of it as a father does of his first-born. I am proud, not of it, but of you—proud beyond measure of having found such a one as you to inspire me. I think that there are such subtle forces in Nature that the very act of our meeting may have brought into instantaneous being a new soul, whose influence we may both feel so long as we live. How is a soul born? May it not be by the commingling of two souls that think together and feel together? I love to think that certain acts—incidents—occurrences—may be represented by souls which are ever about us, influencing us for good or evil. Why should not my memory be in itself a

living soul? Dreams—who can tell us what dreams are—how they come to us? Why may we not think of them as the fantastic masques played by those spirits which are visible only to us when sleep has come, and we have been borne to another world, where the souls of our acts—nay, the souls of our very thoughts—have a form? . . . I am carried away. All that I meant to say is that you and I have come together, and that—that—what am I to say?"

"That the result is that soul which is a poem," said she. "A poem is immortal if it has a soul within it. I think that yours will have a germ of that immortality about it, Byron."

"I have read it every day, and I tell you that I have not yet thought of it, except as something impersonal," said he. "I think I can criticise it as if I had not held the pen that wrote it. It is not a thing to be praised; it is not a thing to be blamed; but it is something. It is a distinct something—a distinct voice. It is not loud, it is not deep, it may travel no distance; it may be lost in the empty air before it falls upon any ear; but, believe me, it is a true voice, Mary; it is not merely a hollow echo of the voice of another. There! I have talked enough about it."

"You will bring it to me," she said. "You will read it to me, and I shall never forget it."

"It is scarce worth remembering," said he. "But you shall have it. It shall go back to you, my Mary."

"Back to me?"

"Back to you. The stars are given to the night by the sea, but when the blank night has been made glad with starlight, the stars return unto the sea again. You shall have the song which you lent me."

He had risen when speaking, and when he had spoken he bent down and kissed her hand which was resting on the back of the seat—whiter than the carved marble. He walked away without another word.

The girl felt greatly moved. It seemed to her that

she had been talking, not with a youth who was some years younger than herself, but with a man who had had experience of life—everything that made up life. He had left her glowing in the thought that she had brought to the surface that spring of poetry which had previously been welling up unseen and unsuspected even by himself in his nature. It was she who had given him the impulse for which he was waiting. If she had not come to him he might have continued silent—perplexed by those vague yearnings of which he had spoken, not knowing what they meant or how they would be satisfied.

This thought sent a delightful glow through every part of her body—a glow of pride, she fancied it was—pride and affection. She believed that the pleasure which she felt arose from the thought that he was one of the household to which she belonged—her kinsman. She was proud of herself also, in that she had persisted in stopping the coach and carrying him with her to Annesley Hall. She had often been present when her stepfather and some of their neighbours had talked about the young Lord Byron. She had observed the head-shakings of the men when they mentioned the name of his mother. She had seen the mother in London, and therefore she understood quite well what their head-shakings meant. She had seen the way the men cast their eyes up to heaven, raising hopeless hands in the same direction, when the name of his father was mentioned. She had heard as much about his father as enabled her to understand why the attitude of people who had also known him should be expressive of despair. She had seen the boy with the large eyes and the auburn curls during the visit which she and her mother had paid to Mrs. Byron, and she had pitied him, having seen his mother. She had often wondered what would be the future of this titled youth, the mention of the name of whose parents had compelled that head-shaking and eye-raising. She had pitied him with all her heart, following the lead

of her mother in this respect. She knew that he would need all the sympathy which she could offer him. And then that fortunate moment came when she found herself able to be his friend ; and the result—he had told her what was the result of her friendliness. She had caused him to find out that he was a poet, and she was proud of having done this. She had not made him a poet, but she had made him know that he was one,

Her eyes had been full of tears when he told her the story ; and now those tears began to fall when she thought of what he must have suffered, never having known that sympathy which her instinct told her meant life to such a temperament as his. She had heard that he was of a peculiar disposition. The son of one of the Chaworths' neighbours had been at Harrow-on-the-Hill for three terms while Byron was there, and he had brought home a schoolboy's report of his schoolfellow. He had been a milksop when he first went to school, but he had greatly improved until, toward the end of his third term, he was almost as ready as the most pugnacious boy in his house to enter into a fight with fists on any point of offended honour ; in addition, he had proved, more than once, that he was highly gifted as an organiser of insubordination ; and he could swim—oh yes, he certainly could swim. Of course, it could not be expected that he should be a great cricketer, or that he should do anything in the fives-court ; but that was no reason why he should wish to be let alone when these games were going on. It was a pity, the narrator thought, that a fellow who had so much in him as to be able to box in spite of his unsteadiness on his pins, should have taken to wandering about the fields alone, or lying under a tree, doing absolutely nothing but thinking. The boy who spent his time thinking, when he might have been boxing, could, in his opinion, come to no good.

Mary had heard something of this report, and she felt that she had been grossly astray in sympathising with young Byron. But now she knew that she was

justified in her sympathy. A poet among a pack of young barbarians was like an Italian greyhound in a kennel of foxhounds—like a linnet in a rookery. She could understand how it was that he found himself wandering away from the other boys, idling under trees, where only the faint sound of the shouts of the playing fields could be heard; his schoolmates could not understand it, however, nor, for that matter, could Byron himself. He had, she could see, fought manfully to be a commonplace schoolboy like the rest; but he had been born a poet, and he could no more shake himself free from his destiny than a swallow can avoid skimming through the hollows of the clouds, although it may have been hatched in the eaves of a hen-house.

But she understood, and felt a glow of pleasure while she thought—

“It was through me that the mystery was revealed to him.”

CHAPTER IX

BYRON had never before in his life known such gladness as he felt when he mounted the horse which he had been riding since he had come to Annesley, and sent it at a gallop across the open country that lay outside the spacious grounds that surrounded the Hall. He now felt as if he had no longing for anything—as if he had attained to the summit of his desire. He was young enough and fresh enough to feel that, having reached the summit of his desire, there was no more climbing to be done, or that the horizon of his hopes was only widened when he stood on that high peak.

What more could he hope for in the world than this which he had reached—this consciousness that he was a poet, and that he loved the only girl in the world who was worthy of being loved? He had loved her from the first. If he had ever before fancied that he was in love—and he had had one or two such fancies—he now knew that it had only been because there was something that pertained to Mary Chaworth in each of his loves. They were like pale shadows of her—they were what the perfume of the rose is to the rose itself. One becomes aware, walking on the confines of a garden, of a delicate scent softening the air, and one breathes of the scent with delight; and then one suddenly comes upon the glory of the rose. He had been on the confines of many a rose-garden, and the perfume had pleased him; but until now he had never seen the glory of the rose.

Love had entered into his life at the same moment as that other mystery had been revealed to him—it

must have been at the very moment, for he found it impossible to say whether the poetry came to him as the result of his loving, or if he loved because he had sung. Yes, it was certain that both mysteries had been revealed to him at the same moment—or was it that the two were one? and, if they were, was he to assume that, having told her of the one, there was no need for him to say a word of the other?

Surely she knew that he loved her, and could he doubt that she returned his love? Could anyone doubt that it was the instinct of love—the divinity in love—that had led her to the spot where he lay asleep? It was the romance of Cymon and Iphigenia reversed: it was the maiden who had come upon the sleeping swain; but the result was the same. He had not failed to see the glistening of her eyes while he was telling her his story. He did not want any further sign than this. She had been led to him by love. She had spoken to him in a voice that was an echo of his own, and the tears of love had been in her eyes.

Was it any wonder that he felt that he had attained the summit of happiness? Had life anything better to offer him than this exhilaration—this sense of exaltation—of a calm passion—of perfect peace? He looked around on the world as if it was the world that he had conquered. But, indeed, all that he desired at that moment was that the world could share his happiness. It was too much for one human being to contain. He had enough for all the world.

He did not return until late in the evening. Mary and he were to sup alone this evening; her stepfather and mother were dining with the Bramleys, at Colwick, and would not return until night. He had brought his verses down from his room, and had left the manuscript on a jasper pedestal bearing a gilt figure of Diana with her quiver, in the great square hall. On the opposite side of the hall there was a companion pedestal, but of onyx, carrying a figure of the poised

Mercury on his ball. Each pedestal stood at a side of the frame of a life-sized picture ; the Diana was beneath a portrait by Thornhill of a gentleman in the uniform of a Deputy Lieutenant, the Mercury was beneath that of a graceful young woman by Gainsborough. Byron knew that Mary would ask him to keep his promise in regard to the reading of the verses to her ; but he did not like to show himself too ready to put them into her hand. Thus he had refrained from keeping the manuscript in his pocket ; but he had placed it where he could find it at a moment's notice. Climbing the long staircase gave him some trouble.

All this evening he felt shy and self-conscious, though it was delightful to be left alone with her ; and, indeed, Mary herself seemed not quite at her ease. There was a certain amount of constraint in their conversation, especially when the servants were in the room. She asked him how he had enjoyed his ride—if the horse had gone well, and if he had tried it again upon any of the fences. He replied in the baldest fashion, and praised the plums. They were on his plate before him, and he was in a position to judge of their appearance as well as their flavour, for he scarcely raised his eyes from where they lay. He preferred them to peaches, he affirmed, and when she asked him why, he said that they were like negresses ; peaches were like—he lost his courage, for the butler was still in the room, and the thought that perhaps the man might fancy that he was going too far in the absence of the elders if he had said what was in his mind in regard to the complexion of the peaches, restrained him.

Mary gave a laugh and said—

“ Yes, I agree with you ; but why should you find it pleasanter to eat a mulatto plum than a Circassian peach ? ”

“ It is more natural, is it not ? ” said he.

“ It is the difference between black-faced mutton and white. I suppose you had magnificent mutton

in Scotland. Papa thinks that the Welsh is not to be compared to the Highland."

So they talked of all that was commonplace, as people do who have a great deal to talk about that is not commonplace. And even when they went together into one of the drawing-rooms, she did not at once spring to the topic that was nearest her heart, and he seemed to have forgotten the promise that he had given her. The piano was open, and on the stand between the silver candlesticks there lay open a book of songs, which had recently been published, and was to be found on a good many pianos throughout the kingdom. A patriotic young Irishman, named Thomas Moore, had collected some of the beautiful melodies of his native land, and had wedded them to verses of his own writing, the result being a much happier union than that which had just been brought about between the two islands.

"I have found the most glorious song in the book," she cried, when he had strayed to the piano and begun listlessly to turn over the pages of the music book. "I must sing it to you to-night. You are sure to like it. It might have been written by the Genius of Patriotism. There is the swing of a broadsword in every line; and now and again you may perceive the glitter of the steel in the sunlight as it makes its clean cut."

"Mr. Moore's verses are never wanting in glitter—that is their quality," said Byron. "It seems to me that he is not only the collector of melodies, but the discoverer of melody as well."

"I only wish I could do justice to this one," said she. "I think it is an appropriate choice to-night, for it is called 'The Minstrel Boy.'"

He gave a startled flush, and then a laugh.

"Sing it to me, Mary," he whispered.

She struck a chord, and then the melody of the Irish race awoke, with its wild flashes of enthusiasm, alternating with its soft melancholy—its bursting bars

of hopefulness—its passionate despair—the history of the land of its birth. A lost cause wails through its music, and its glints of brightness are like the glints of sunlight that sweep through its sorrowful clouds, showing the emerald patches on the Irish mountain for a moment only.

“Listen to this,” said Mary Chaworth.

The minstrel boy to the war is gone;
In the ranks of death you'll find him.
His father's sword he has girded on,
And his wild harp slung behind him.
“Land of Song,” said the warrior bard,
“Though all the world betrays thee,
One sword at least thy rights shall guard,
One faithful harp shall praise thee.”

The minstrel fell, but the foeman's chain
Could not bring that proud soul under.
The harp he loved ne'er spoke again,
For he tore its cords asunder;
And said, “No chain shall sully thee,
Thou soul of love and bravery!
Thy songs were made for the pure and free,
They shall never sound in slavery!”

The girl ended, not with the crash of the lost battle, not with the melancholy of minor chords, but with a note of victory—the rallying trumpet music of a triumph.

“That is for you, my dear Cousin Byron!” she cried. “That song is for you, my poor minstrel, going out to war with the world with a sword that you have not yet learned to wield, but that you will surely wield in the cause of liberty. Your sword and your harp will ever be on the side of liberty, Byron, whatever may happen—promise me that, dear.”

The tears that had been in her voice were now shining in her eyes. It was not with tears that his eyes were flashing. He felt like the young knight whose sword has just been bound to his thigh by the lady of his choice. What could he not achieve when wearing the favour of such a lady as this, who was now

standing before him with her hands on his shoulders, her eyes looking down into his, full of earnestness, and of the tears which are the earnest of an inheritance of tenderness ?

“ I swear it to you, Mary,” he said. “ You have put the sword into my hand, and I will use it against your enemies—all the enemies that would assail you and whatever you hold dear. It will go hard with us if we do not succeed in crushing at least some of them. Trust me, Mary—you may trust me.”

“ I will indeed, I will always trust you, whatever may happen, and a great deal must happen that will be difficult to bear,” she said, still looking into his face through her overflowing eyes.

Suddenly her hands dropped from his shoulders, she turned away from him with a quick movement—almost spasmodic. She felt sure that he heard her stifle a sigh. Then she turned to him quickly again, and her mood of melancholy had changed instantaneously—surprisingly.

“ Your promise—your promise, Byron,” she said in a breath.

“ I have given you my promise, and I mean to keep it,” he said.

“ Oh, I don’t mean that,” she cried, almost petulantly. “ I mean the promise you gave me in the garden—I have been thinking about it ever since—the poem—you have brought it to me ? ”

He had actually forgotten for the time that he had written a poem. And even now, when he remembered it, it seemed a very small thing compared with the issues of the previous ten minutes. When the young knight has laid his hand on the grip of his sword, he is not to be blamed if he has left his lute still hanging on the willow.

“ I did not forget that promise ; but the other is so much greater,” said he. “ I brought the paper down with me, and left it in the hall. I shall fetch it if you wish—but how can you read it while the echoes of

that wonderful song have scarcely faded away? It will seem very thin and feeble in comparison."

"Quick—quick," she said, pointing toward the door, and smiling. "Nay, if you are fearful of the ghostly echoes of 'The Minstrel,' I will go with you, and we shall read it together in the hall."

She put her hand on his arm, and they left the room together. There was a short passage with a few steps, between the drawing-room and the hall. It was too short to have a light of its own. Seeing that the lamps of the hall were burning dim, they left the drawing-room door wide open, so that the illumination from the candles in the chandelier blazed through the passage. But before they had taken half a dozen steps, there arose behind them the sound of the shaking of the drawing-room windows in the frames, as though struck by a strong gust of wind.

They stopped, startled by the sound.

"The door!" cried Mary, springing back to prevent the slamming of the door which they had left ajar—she had seen it begin to swing, but she was too late to hold it back. It slammed with a tremendous clash, and a clanging of glass and old china in the many cabinets along the walls of the room.

Mary gave an exclamation of alarm, but before the clink of the glass had ceased, there came from the hall the sound as of the tearing away of the panelling, and this was followed by a dull crash that shook the house. A whirl of dust went in their faces, and the place was plunged in darkness, the lamps having been blown out, so that for some time neither Mary nor Byron could know what had happened.

Then came the voices of servants from across the hall—the men shouting back for candles, the maids shrill and affrighted—the butler only crying out, not so loud as to be disrespectful, but still, with a force that suggested the stables.

"Are you there, my lord? Are you safe, Miss Mary? Lord ha' mercy! Did I hear your voice, my

lord ? Be quiet, you unmannerly crew behind there ! I believe 'tis his lordship's voice."

" All right, Mayne," Byron sang out. " We are all right here. What has happened ? Can you see ? "

" The ceiling has fallen, my lord—leastaways, it sounded like it," said the butler. " Thank God, Miss Mary was not under it ! They're fetching candles, my lord ! Phew ! what a dust ! "

Mary had hastened back to the drawing-room to get lights—she could see that all the candles had not been extinguished by that amazing gust. But Byron was groping his way into the hall through the dust and débris.

All at once the place was flooded with lights from both sides. The servants brought lamps, and Mary was carrying a silver candelabrum. The lights went in streams through an atmosphere of dust as if it had been one of fog. With candles held aloft it was possible within a minute to see what had happened. The full-length portrait by Thornhill which had been hanging in the recess at one side of the first flight of stairs, had fallen on the floor, the massive wooden frame tearing away a portion of the oak panel of the wall in its descent, and overturning the jasper pedestal with its gilt figure. There the great picture lay face downward, one edge of the frame resting where it had swerved in falling, against the oak banisters a few feet from the floor : while the light was shining upon the ormolu of the beautiful Diana, lying where it had tumbled several yards away.

Jammed between the frame and the jasper pedestal was the manuscript which Byron had hidden behind the figure some hours previously.

" 'Twas God's mercy that you were sitting elsewhere, miss, and my lord, too," was the comment of the butler. They were standing about the fallen picture, servants of all degrees, disregarding precedence under the strain of the catastrophe, holding candles above their heads like torches—even Miss Chaworth

had not abandoned her candelabrum. They stood as people stand round the body of a man who has been killed by accident. They seemed to be anxious to learn if he was quite dead. All the rest of the hall was in gloom. The butler ordered one of the footmen to re-light the lamps; this was when the effects of the panic were beginning to wear off. Other men were told to set the place in order. Byron rescued his poem.

“What a gust that was—I never saw the like; ‘twas the gust beyond doubt that did the mischief, if we only knew how,” said the housekeeper.

“A gust! ’Twas the hurricane of a moment—something like a flash of lightning in the form of a hurricane, if I’m not speaking too secular,” said the butler.

“I saw no lightning, nor thunder whatsoever, though there might have been a peal that got lost in the crash of the picture,” said the housekeeper.

“I didn’t presume to say there was lightning, only that the gust had the quickness of lightning about it, and the blast of a hurricane as well,” replied the butler. He felt that the woman was too ready to quibble. Was this a moment for quibbling?

“We had just left the drawing-room on our way here; it was the drawing-room door that slammed, and the next moment came the crash of the picture,” said Miss Chaworth. “I suppose the slamming of the door had something to do with the falling of the picture.”

One of the men was examining the picture-chain and another was peering up at the top of the oak panel where the hook was. The hook was still in its place, and the chain was intact. What had given way was one of the rings that had been screwed into the side of the great frame itself. It appeared likely that the wood had become slightly rotten about the ring, so that the picture had been for, perhaps, a long time hanging by a very shaky screw, which at last gave way

through the tremor caused by the violent slamming of the door.

Happily no damage was done that could not be easily repaired ; the moulding of the oak panel was broken away where the frame had slipped a foot or two down the wall before falling forward, and the frame itself had a splinter or two knocked off one of its mouldings ; this was the sum of the damage.

“ ‘Twas God’s mercy,’ began the butler once more ; he seemed to think that it was necessary for him to do his best for the honour of the house to prevent his lordship from going away with the idea that the incident was trivial ; but his lordship laughed and followed Miss Chaworth, a footman carrying her candelabrum, back into the drawing-room.

Miss Chaworth was not smiling.

“ ‘Twas God’s mercy”—said Byron, imitating the voice of the butler.

“ Was it ? ” said the girl. “ I am not sure. It was strange — terribly strange ! You heard that gust which came through the window and shook the whole house ? ”

“ It has not been repeated ; the night is quite still now,” said he.

“ That is what makes it so strange,” said she. “ The night was never otherwise than still. That awful gust blew out of a perfectly calm sky. Unearthly ! I think it was unearthly.”

He saw that she was pale, and when he laid his hand on hers he felt that it was trembling.

“ Dear Mary, whatever danger there may have been it is over now,” he said. “ Why should you be so anxious now ? ”

“ Unearthly—I felt it,” she said, not looking at him, but into vacancy. “ I tell you I felt it passing me when I stood in the passage for that moment—it fled past me—something.”

“ The wind—I felt it too—when the door slammed. I distinctly felt the cold touch—”

“ The cold touch—that was it—a horrid cold touch—like an icy hand—the hand of a dead person.”

He had a momentary shock ; but he quickly recovered himself, remembering that it lay with him to quiet the nervousness of a girl.

“ Take my word for it, my dear cousin, 'twas the cold touch of the wind,” said he. “ Why, did we not see its effects—and hear them into the bargain ? What do you fancy it was that banged the door and blew out the lights if not the wind ? ”

Then she turned to him.

“ Cousin Byron,” she said, in a whisper that had something of terror in it. “ Cousin Byron, do you know whose portrait that was which fell ? ”

“ I never heard—oh yes, I did ; it was the portrait of your father's predecessor,” said Byron. “ He died a long time ago—more than fifty years ago, your father told me.”

“ Do you know how he died ?—you must have heard the terrible story,” said the girl.

“ I think your father mentioned America—was he not a soldier ? Did not he fight against the brave Washington ? I hope he repented of it before he died.”

“ You are thinking of his younger brother. No, that is the portrait of the Chaworth who was killed by the last Lord Byron—your father's uncle.”

CHAPTER X

BYRON looked at her for a few moments. She perceived from his expression that he had never heard the story with which all England had rung when his father was still a boy.

“Is it possible that you never heard of the duel—it was called a duel—between Lord Byron and the original of that portrait ?” she said.

“I heard nothing of it,” said he, after a breathless pause. “Who was there to tell me of it ? I was cut off from the family of Byron. My grand-uncle never acknowledged my existence, even after he knew that I was his heir.”

“They were kinsmen and associates, and unhappily their tempers were akin,” said Mary. “They had constant quarrels during the years that they were neighbours, and one night—it is said that they were dining together—a crisis came. No one knows whether the insult came from Lord Byron or from my ancestor, but there were hot words and a blow. It is said that Mr. Chaworth wished to arrange for a meeting to take place the next morning, but Lord Byron forced him at the point of the sword to draw at that very hour in his own defence. They fought in a room which was lighted by a single candle. There were no witnesses. A few minutes after they entered the room, the servants, who were huddled about the door outside, heard the voice of my ancestor crying out ‘Murder !’ There was the sound of a heavy fall, and a derisive word in the voice of his antagonist. The door was thrown open, and

Mr. Chaworth was seen lying on his back on the floor, his sword at the other end of the room, and Lord Byron standing over him with the candle in one hand and his sword dripping blood in the other."

Byron was breathing heavily. His throat felt dry and his lips parted. He seemed to be trying to speak, but only a husky word or two came from him, and then indistinctly—

"Murdered—murdered—and your ancestor!" were the only words that the girl heard him speak.

"Everyone declared that murder had been done; but Lord Byron was tried by his peers and only found guilty of manslaughter," said Mary.

There was a long pause. Through the silence in the room there came the sounds of the servants in the hall trying to raise the picture. Their staggering feet on the bare floor suggested to Byron's ears men bearing a heavy body across the boards.

"Murdered—your father's father—and yet I am here to-night," he said, in a whisper.

"Why should you not be here?" she cried, with almost passionate vehemence. "Why should not that horrible thing be forgotten? It is not as if you were his direct descendant. You are only the son of his brother's son; that does not connect you with him, except distantly. My stepfather feels that, and my mother also. That was why she paid a visit to Mrs. Byron in London long ago; and that being so, why should he?—"

She glanced toward the door as if she expected to see someone there.

Byron understood what she meant. But he did not look toward the door.

"You think," he said, after a pause. "You think that he—that he—the falling of the picture—in another second or two I should have been beneath it—you think—is that what is in your thought, Mary—a protest?"

She put her hands before her face, and he saw how

agitated she was. She was breathing in rapid sobs, and spasmodically. This was for him, he felt; the imminence of danger had overcome her. The thought overwhelmed him. He would have liked to throw himself at her feet, [and tell her that his heart was full of love for her—that he was ready to do anything for her happiness—even to go away from her for ever. But he felt that suddenly a cold hand had been stretched out from another world between them. In every phrase that had come from the girl in telling him the story of the duel between their kinsfolk he had been conscious of the obtrusion of that dead hand—it came between them—it forced them apart.

At last she took her hands from her face.

“It is ridiculous!” she said. “You can only think me a foolish girl—superstitious—affrighted at a shadow—no, not even a shadow—only the shadow of a shadow—a freak of the fancy—a gust of wind. But you will allow that it was a strange thing. Why should it have fallen just at that moment?—tell me that. It held quite firmly all these years; but just when you—you—the representative of the Byron family—when you, I say, are within a dozen yards of his picture—of that heavy frame—if it had fallen upon you, you would never have spoken again.”

“Dear Mary—dearest girl—do you know how I feel when I think of your being so affected on my behalf?” he said, leaning over her tenderly, his hand resting on the back of her chair.

She sprang to her feet with a little cry of distress. She held up both her hands against him—only for a second, however, then she cried—

“The poem—the poem—your poem, Cousin Byron. You have not yet kept your promise! Good heavens! What have we been thinking of—talking of all this time, while a poem remained to be read? Come, the poem—the poem—your poem—*my* poem—whatever may happen, Byron, I will always call it *my* poem.”

She had walked across the room, tripping in a dainty minuet step of exquisite artificiality—a suggestion of gaiety that made her like a figure in a masque of "Spring." But he knew that she was acting; there was no perfume of Spring in the room across which she had flitted. She threw herself upon a sofa that stood in the farthest alcove of the opposite wall, and smiled toward him.

"I am on the tiptoe of expectancy, Cousin Byron," she cried.

"I cannot read it to you now," he said.

She straightened herself on the sofa—she had been lying back before. She stretched out a derisive finger at him.

"What? But your promise—you gave me your promise," she cried.

He shook his head; but remained silent. A poem seemed a poor thing to him at that moment. What were a few lines that jingled together, compared with a living incident?

"Let me speak to you instead, Mary," said he.

"Oh, we have had too much speaking," she cried.
"We have neglected the poem."

"I must speak," he said. "Even though I have received a terrible shock, I will speak what is in my heart."

She rose quickly.

"Hush. They have returned," she said. "I hear the sound of the carriage. They will be in the hall in a minute. We must meet them there."

She hurried abruptly from the room, leaving him standing where he had risen from his chair a few moments before. Her abruptness was on the verge of rudeness; and he was still a boy in point of sensitiveness. She had, as it were, reminded him of his helplessness; at any rate she seemed to have forgotten that he was unable to move so quickly as she did. But then she seemed to fly.

He stood there alone for some time. He heard Mr.

and Mrs. Clarke passing into the hall, and Mary's rapid account of the fall of the picture, with a laugh now and again from her, and an exclamation of surprise in her stepfather's bass, as she hurried on. Then they all laughed together: they clearly lacked their daughter's imagination which had caused her to be superstitious in regard to the accident. It was apparent that Mr. Clarke was talking only of the defective screw, which the butler was pointing out to him. He could distinctly hear the butler say—

“ 'Twas the mercy of Heaven, sir, that—”

He joined the others in the hall, and made his remarks on the incident.

“ I' faith, my lad, you were lucky,” said Mr. Clarke. “ If you had been sitting in your usual place you would have got the full weight of the top of the frame on your skull, and we should be puzzled to know where to look for the new Lord Byron.”

“ If that had happened, the account would only be square between the Byrons and the Chaworths,” said Byron slowly.

Mrs. Clarke grasped his meaning at once though her husband did not do so immediately; but the moment he perceived what was in Byron's mind, he smiled, saying—

“ True—so it would; there's some reason in what you say. But, thank Heaven, there's no balance of accounts kept in this way as it is in Sicily. You have heard of the vendetta, Byron? Someone told me that the same system prevails in the Highlands. Is there not a red cross—a fiery cross, or some clannish thing of that type? Well, I'll see that the picture is properly clamped to the wall to-morrow, to prevent the possibility of an accident. You will then be able to sit here with confidence.”

Nothing more was said on the subject. Mr. Clarke, a few steps back from where the picture stood on the floor, leaning up against the injured panel, looked at the painting critically, and asserted that

Mr. Lawrence never would be the master that Thornhill was. Mr. Lawrence never could make a man stand boldly on his own feet. He called Byron's attention to the nobility of the pose of the figure in the picture before him.

"Ah no ; there are no painters nowadays like what we used to have ; and so I think we had better go to bed," said he.

Thus, unconcernedly, they separated, only Byron, shaking hands with Mary, noticed that she was pale, and that there was still a look of restlessness in her eyes. She had certainly been deeply impressed by what had occurred.

It was not until he was in his own room that he asked himself what it was that had left so deep an impression on her. Was it the thought of the risk that he had run ? Was it the sensation which she said she had experienced when that strange gust of wind had rushed past her ? Was it a mingling of these feelings that had produced her curious restlessness when she had been with him in the drawing-room, and that he had seen in her eyes when he had taken her hand at parting ? Or was it that she had been conscious of that cold hand which he had felt coming between them when she was telling him the story of the fatal duel ?

He stood leaning against the side of his window trying to think out these questions which he had asked himself, and he had not succeeded in finding an answer to any one of them, before he began to ask himself what was the origin of the restlessness which had taken possession of him since he had sat with Mary in the garden, and told her that he had written his verses. His answer came to him speedily. He loved her. He had loved her from the moment when he had opened his eyes and seen her face looking down upon his own.

And then this restlessness of his drove him back to wonder if that terrible incident which had

happened before either of them was born, had always been regarded by her as a barrier between them—if there was something repulsive to her in the thought of loving or being loved by the living representative of the man who had murdered her ancestor.

He knew what his own feelings had been while she was in the act of telling him the story, and he was still conscious of the presence of that hand which had come between the girl and himself. But a few minutes later she had told him with almost passionate vehemence that the whole incident should be forgotten—that she did not think of him as being any relation to the man who had been guilty of the death of her father's father; but although she had said this, he remembered that, so far from becoming more tranquil, she had become more excited than before, glancing toward the door with a certain expression of fear in her eyes.

Of what was she fearful? Was it of some supernatural power of evil of whose approach the falling of the picture was a warning? Was she thinking of the narrowness of his escape from almost certain death? Was she so greatly attached to him that the very thought of the risk he had run perturbed her?

He would have given all that he possessed to be satisfied that this view of the matter was the right one. He had been about to test it when she had hastened to the other side of the room, simulating a gay indifference to Fate, and thus preventing him from telling her all that he had in his heart to tell her.

And if she had acted with this intention, would he be doing wrong to assume that she had some instinct of what his revelation to her would be? Would his declaration of love be no revelation to her? Had she guessed long before what was in his heart?

Had she done so by looking into her own heart?

It was the instinct of this boy's genius that told him that a woman always comes to a knowledge of what

is in a man's heart by looking into her own. But it did not tell him why she had been so persistent in averting the moment of his declaration to her—why she had harped upon his promise to read his poem to her—why she had given a sigh of relief when she had sprung to her feet on hearing the wheels of the carriage on the drive.

The life of a genius with the affections of a man is made up of alternate flights into the highest heaven, and descents into the deepest hell ; and the story of Byron is essentially the story of a genius with affections. Within the space of an hour, while he stood at his window facing the black night, or lay undressed upon his bed, or paced his floor with uneven steps, he felt all the exaltation of a boy who knows that he is loved, and all the tortures of the man who doubts. One moment his heart was singing a pæan, and before he had crossed the room the strain dwindled into a dirge. He knew that he loved, but he had no assurance that he was beloved ; and to be without assurance is to a lover to be in a bottomless pit of despair.

He looked out to the night ; but the night was blank ; he threw himself upon his couch and tried to work out the question as if it were a mathematical problem—giving a numerical value to every sign that he could recollect of favours shown to him by the girl—he thought of a hundred favours, but he was no happier than before, for in his calculations the value of that curious change of hers from passionate earnestness to the cajolery of a play actress with pretty feet, served to upset his mathematics and to send him on a pendulous excursion between the walls of his room. To and fro he went, sometimes with bowed head, again with uplifted head, now and then with hands clasped behind his back, and for many journeys interlocked above him.

The room was too small for him ; he felt—after pacing it for a bad hour—that the atmosphere was stifling. He threw open his door and stepped out

noiselessly upon the carpet of the corridor leading to the gallery above the staircase. But even if he had been wearing boots, and had walked on the bare oak, he would not, he knew, be running a chance of awaking anyone. The rooms of Mr. and Mrs. Clarke were in the front of the house, and Mary slept in the same wing.

He felt refreshed by the cool air of the corridor, and strolled backward and forward for some time. He stood looking out of the great groined window at the end of the passage for some time, and then he retraced his steps until he was at the head of the first flight of stairs. He remained here, finding it restful to lean over the smooth oak rail, looking down upon the short flight of shallow steps that sprung directly from the hall to the broad landing with the window emblazoned with the shields and quarterings of the family. The single lamp which burned all night in a corner of the hall sent out only a faint gleam to touch the polished oak at places and to make a ruby blaze upon the facets of the gules of the leaded panes.

The night was profoundly still. Outside there was no whisper of wind ; the hoot of a single owl came from a distance, and one note of the night-jar whirred past the house. Such sounds only made the dead silence within seem all the more intense. A velvet silence draped the hall, so that the solitary watcher at the head of the stairs had a feeling of looking into a vast, vaulted tomb, and the thin light of the lamp had the semblance of phosphorescence or that weird illuminant which he had heard called a corpse-candle.

He remained, a part of the silence, for some time, but no revelation came to him out of its depths. He lifted his head from the gallery rail and returned with slow steps to the corridor leading to his room. When he opened his door the light of the candle, which he had left burning, flickered across the wall outside. At the same instant he became aware of a

faint sound—it might have been a footfall on the stairs. He turned quickly round.

He saw it at once float athwart the flicker of the candlelight down the corridor—something of white—a shape, but blurred. He remained breathless for a space with his hand on the door of his room. His heart's beating was audible to him for more than a moment. Then he heard another soft pat of a foot upon the floor of the gallery.

For some time he could not stir; he could only listen. He heard another pat—pat—pat—after that, silence. He crept along the carpet of the corridor and cautiously put forth his head. . . . There she was standing with her foot on the first step of the staircase, her hand on the banister rail. She was robed in white, and her feet were bare. Had she been otherwise she would have been almost invisible, so faint was the light that came from the depths of the hall. But he saw her. She seemed to his eyes like the Angel of the Resurrection descending into the vault. Her hair, which slipped in coils loose over her shoulders, seemed to have a light of its own, enabling him to see her face. It was white; its whiteness lay upon the darkness like an alabaster carving laid on a background of black marble. And while he watched her she went down the stairs—slowly and cautiously, her left hand slipping along the slope of the smooth rail, and her feet being on the polished woodwork between the stair carpet and the banisters. She went down to the first landing, where she stood for some time; and now, looking down from the gallery to which he had crept, he saw her figure clearly as she approached the light in the hall. He saw her beautiful white face and little white feet. He saw the soft suggestions of the lines of her figure shining through the single garment that she wore—the sinuous snowy robe.

In an instant the truth flashed upon him: the girl was walking in her sleep—some purpose was in her mind—a somnambulist's purpose—and she

was going down to the hall—perhaps out of doors—to fulfil it.

In an instant he rose to his feet. He felt that it was necessary for him to take some action. He had heard of sleep-walkers doing dangerous things— injuring themselves—killing themselves. What if the impulse which was on her at that moment should tend in such a direction? She was not accountable for her acts in this state. She might be forced to do something terrible. There was a wide and deep fish-pond not so far from the entrance to the hall. . . .

He did not hesitate. He went as quickly as possible down the stairs, and reached the floor a few minutes after he had seen her descend. At first he did not perceive in which direction she had gone; but the taking of a step to the right was sufficient to show her to him once more. She was standing in front of the picture that had fallen. The misty light of the lamp shone upon the gilding of the broad frame, and was reflected upon her white face. It made her robes seem diaphanous—nay, she appeared to be herself as transparent as a mist through which a light shines.

He stood at the foot of the staircase watching her with palpitating heart and a gasping of breath in his throat, which he strove to check but could not. He was trembling so that he found it necessary to support himself by a hand on the great carved newel post. He could not move from where he stood, though his longing to go to her side—to put his arms about her, and tell her that she might trust him to love her for ever—was intense.

She remained looking up to the face of the picture for a long time; then she clasped her hands and, in an imploring attitude, uttered some words. Her phrases were spoken in a low tone, and were disjointed. She seemed simply to be sighing a word or two. Then she turned away from the picture. He did not move, so that she faced him in a moment. He saw that

the look of anxiety—of restlessness—which had been on her face when he was with her in the drawing-room, was intensified. She went close to him ; he could feel the soft warmth of her gentle body—the soft warmth of a white rose—beside him ; but her cold expressionless eyes told him that she was still asleep.

She stood beside him for a while as if uncertain whether or not to ascend the stairs. Then she turned once more and went quickly back to the picture. She clasped her hands again, and now she spoke distinctly, and the words that she said were—

“ Spare him—you will spare him—I implore of you to spare him because I love him. Surely you will respect that plea. I love him. Even though I may wrong him and—”

So far he had heard clearly all that she said, but now the tone of her voice fell. Her words became less audible until at last her lips only were moving ; her words were no louder than a sigh. He failed to hear any of them clearly. Her lips were still moving rapidly while she went backward from the picture, and on to the stairs, her robe brushing him as she passed. He watched her go slowly up the staircase until she disappeared in the gallery off which her room was situated.

Not for a moment had he a thought of awaking her. He had a feeling that her sleep was sacred. He even felt that he had been an eavesdropper, having overheard those words which she had uttered in the confidence of unconsciousness. It was something like having surprised her while bathing, and then staying to watch her. His self-reproach would have seemed to many people to be artificial ; but to him it was for the moment very real ; and its impression lasted with him even until he had reached his room, and had sat down to think over his experience of the night.

His thoughts somehow contracted until they were dwelling only upon that little pair of naked feet

which he had seen beneath the embroidery of that white clinging robe. That beautiful picture filled all his thoughts. He was unable to feel the elation which should certainly have been his, having heard the confession that had come from her when face to face with the picture. And when he lay awake in his bed, it was not the thought that the difficult question which had perplexed him an hour before, was now answered, that kept him from sleep ; it was only the thought of those little bare feet.

He did not close his eyes for another hour.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN he awoke in the morning after the most eventful night of his life, it was with a sense of perfect happiness—a sense that his life was complete—that the future could bring to him nothing better than what had already come to him. Of course, he felt that he was bound to regard as confidential the confession which he had overheard, but this fact did not diminish from the satisfaction which he derived from overhearing it. It was the truth that she had spoken. Of so much he was assured. And the depth of the love for him to which she had confessed, was proved by the effect it had upon her. The expression of anxiety which he noticed on her face the previous night had been there, he now knew, because she was apprehensive for his safety.

Beyond a doubt she had been greatly frightened by the incidents connected with the falling of the picture. She had talked with conviction about the mysterious nature of that gust of wind which had rushed past her when she stood at the entrance to the drawing-room. He was inclined himself to look at the mysterious side of things, and superstition had been part of his education in Scotland, where there was a word to define things of mystery—"uncanny" was the word which he had heard used with great frequency. This was why he could understand how Mary Chaworth should be affected by the idea of the ghost of her ancestor returning to earth to protest against the appearance of the representative of the man who had slain him, as a guest at Annesley Hall.

How deeply she had been affected by the thought that he might be in danger, had been proved to him very clearly ; and this being so, how could he be otherwise than happy ? He was happy. He felt that his life was complete. He asked for nothing more in the world.

The carpenters were already at work upon the injured panel when he came down to breakfast, Mr. Clarke standing in the hall giving instructions respecting the fitting of powerful bolts to the frame to prevent the possibility of the accident being repeated within a hundred years at least. The workman was ready to give a personal guarantee of five hundred to the new bolts.

“ We must not run the chance of having to send our guests away in their coffins, Byron,” said Mr. Clarke ; and just at that moment Mary came downstairs. She said good-morning to Byron and kissed her father, and then hurried past the picture with only a single glance at it, and that glance had (Byron saw) a shudder in it. He was glad that she did not tarry in the hall. If she had not passed through so rapidly she would certainly have noticed the flush which came upon his face as he thought of how he had seen her in the same place some hours before sunrise. He had an idea that the thought of his eavesdropping would prevent his being able to meet her eye, without letting her know that he had pried upon her secret. And how would it be, he asked himself, when he had told her all that was in his heart—when he had heard from her own true lips the secret which he had heard her confess to the picture ?

She was silent, and so was he, during breakfast. He thought that she looked paler than usual ; but the expression of anxiety was no longer on her face.

After breakfast the horses were brought round to the porch. The young people were accustomed to

have a gallop with Mr. Clarke to visit some of the farms, regardless of the weather; and if Mr. Clarke found himself detained by any bailiff's business, Mary and Byron continued their ride across country. This was what happened now; they had gone to Mertoun Farm, and there had been a talk of the tenant's taking over the lease of the adjoining grazing. An hour would be occupied in settling terms, Mr. Clarke said, and even this was assuming that the tenant would be reasonable, which had never been, he said, an experience of his.

"You can have your ride—give the rascal an hour to grumble about the wet seasons, and half an hour to curse the dry, and drop in on me on your way home," he suggested, when he had dismounted and handed over his horse to one of the farmer's men.

But his stepdaughter showed no disposition to accept his suggestion. She became excessively dutiful, saying, with a pout, that he was tiresome, and that it was too bad that he should be compelled to bear the burden and heat of the tenants' complaints, and, therefore, that she had made up her mind to face the man and tell him that if he meant to take the meadows he should do so at once, and if he did not mean to do so he should not waste valuable time in grumbling—it was useless, besides being impious.

Her stepfather said—

"Indeed, madam, you will make a very pretty business-woman when your time comes; but meantime, I will take care that you do not interrupt my business; so off you go, and come back with some of the pink of the bramble berries in your cheeks. Just now they are as pale as guelders. Off you go."

He gave her mare a cut with his whip, sending her flying along the little track across the great corn-field, which only a month before had been glorious

with the harvest's gold. Byron sent his horse after her at a gallop.

"Where shall we go?" he asked when he had overtaken her at the brook. "This is the clearest day we have had for a week. Shall we ride through the park to the hill and make it our Pisgah?"

Diadem Hill was the highest point of the land in the park. The clump of trees that crowned it had been planted in a circle in the days of the Civil War, to commemorate a victory in which the owner of the estate was interested. But so little interested were the people of the neighbourhood in the incident, the next generation could not tell what was the precise victory it was meant to perpetuate. A fine view of the country was to be had on clear days from its summit. Byron had called it Pisgah. But years had passed before he described it—

A gentle hill,
Green and of mild declivity, the last,
As 'twere the cap of a long ridge of such,
Save that there was no sea to lave its base,
But a most living landscape and the wave
Of woods and cornfields, and the abodes of man
Scattered at intervals, and wreathing smoke
Arising from such rustic roofs; the hill
Was crowned with a peculiar diadem
Of trees in circular array, so fix'd
Not by the sport of nature but of man.

Mary did not seem to hear what he said. She was walking her mare, and her head was drooping. He had to repeat his suggestion, and then she started as if she were awaking from a dream.

"I beg your pardon, Cousin Byron," she said. "I was thinking—thinking that papa takes a vast amount of trouble to—to—oh yes; the hill—any—place—it is all the same to me."

She cantered ahead of him; and the ground where they now were was so uneven that he had difficulty in getting alongside her again. He felt

somewhat hurt at her evident desire to be uncompanionable.

"Do you wish to show me the way?" he said. "I don't think that it is necessary. But perhaps you have something on your mind, and you do not wish me to get close to you to read your thoughts. If you are afraid, I can easily drop behind."

"Do not be a goose, Byron," she said quickly. He drew his rein in a moment; and she made haste to ask his pardon.

"I don't mean that," she said; "I mean that—oh, Byron, I want to make a strange request of you—more than a request—I want to implore of you to go away from me—from us—from Annesley—at once!"

She spoke earnestly—almost fervently, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking with beseeching eyes into his face.

He had never received such a shock as her words gave him. He was too startled to be able to speak. He could only stare at her. He felt the blood leave his face; and for some moments he had an impression of suddenly awaking, having heard words at that instant the exact import of which he had failed to grasp. He could not trust his ears.

"I have startled you," she said. "But indeed, you are not more startled than I am. I did not think that I should be able to say what I have said; but I have spoken, and I am glad. Oh, my dear Byron, it is but too true; you must go away."

"Why should I go away?—tell me that, Mary," he cried. "Why should I go away just now when I have come to know that we—you and I—that we?—"

"You are to go to save yourself from the greatest trouble of your life—to save me from the greatest trouble of mine," she said. "You do not know

how great may be this trouble. But you can judge of it when I tell you that—that—”

“Dare you tell me that it is greater than the pain of parting ? ” he cried.

“I dare—I dare. Do you think that I have not weighed the two—that I have not set the one in the balance against the other ? ” she cried. “I have done so, and yet I can now say, ‘Go—go ! ’ ”

“More bitter words were never spoken,” said he.

“True ; but they save a still more bitter experience,” she replied.

She was looking into his face ; he kept his eyes fixed upon hers.

There was a protracted pause before he said—

“Dear Mary, I know a great deal more of what is in your heart than you fancy I do. You are the sweetest—the best that lives in the world. There can never have been one like you, and there never will be another. I know what is in your heart. It is for me you are afraid—you fear that I am in danger so long as I remain at Annesley. What happened last night made you fear for me. You cannot think that the accident from which I just escaped was due to an ordinary—a natural cause. You have a feeling that the man who was murdered by the last Lord Byron has power to resent the coming to the house which was once his, of anyone bearing the name of his murderer. Am not I right ? ”

She seemed glad to jump at his suggestion.

“That is it,” she said. “You do not think me foolish, Byron ? I know that there are many people who would call me foolish—superstitious. But you are not one of them. You have agreed with me that there are strange things—strange powers. . . . I told you last night that I felt something when that terrifying gust of wind came. . . . If you had gone into the hall a few seconds sooner. . . . When I think of it all. . . . But you will go away before anything happens. What are we that we should try to

contend with these powers? We shall be sorry—you will never know how sorry; but you must go away."

"And I will go away," he said, after a short space of silence.

"You will? Ah, I knew you would grant my request without having a doubtful thought," she cried.

"A doubtful thought? How would it be possible for me to have a doubtful thought, Mary?"

"Why, you might feel that I was outraging all the traditions of hospitality. If my father or mother were to know that I took this step they would never forgive me. But you have understood me—you know that I am trying to save us both from a great unhappiness. You know what is in my heart."

He looked at her earnestly—tenderly.

"I believe I do know what is in your heart," he said. "I only came to know it last night—in a dream—it was revealed to me in a dream. I fancied that I came downstairs and stood in the hall opposite the picture; it was leaning against the panel in the alcove, just as I had seen it before going to bed. It was all very real. The place was in darkness but for a faint gleam that came from the single lamp. And while I stood there alone I seemed to hear the sound of a step on the stairs. I turned my head and saw you coming down to the hall. By one of those incongruities which occur in dreams, you passed close to me without seeing me—you seemed quite unaware of my presence, and I did not speak to you—it seemed quite natural that I should not speak to you. You passed me and went to the picture, and stood before it. I heard you address it as if it were a living person, and the words which you said were—'Spare him—spare him, I implore of you, spare him because'—but the next words were indistinct—they were faint as an angel's singing

in a dream. I had only a sense of their sweetness. When I awoke I knew that that dream had come to reveal to me all that was in your heart."

He saw her become roseate when he mentioned having seen her stand before the picture, and when he pretended that he had failed to hear the words which she had spoken, she gave a little sigh of relief. She gave her mare a touch with her whip and sent her ahead of her companion, but after a canter of a hundred yards or less she slackened her pace to allow him to get abreast of her. They were now not far from the "diadem" of the hill, the panoramic circle was widening in front of them.

"I have never seen the view of the country so clearly," she said, pointing with her whip and sweeping it from right to left. "You were wise to choose this direction for our ride, Cousin Byron. And only last week the valley was full of mist."

"Yes," said Byron, "to-day I think I see things clearly—free from the mists of doubt—the uncertain atmosphere of a dream."

"Byron," she said, "if I had any doubt as to the strange influences which are at work about us, what you have told me of your dream would be enough to convince me that it would be tempting Fate—oh, it would be madness—sheer madness for you to stay with us any longer. Let me tell you that I too had that dream last night—that very dream—it differed in no respect from yours; I fancied that I went downstairs and stood before that picture and spoke to it. Should not that be enough for us—enough to warn us?—people do not have the same dream unless as a warning."

They were riding side by side now, and while she spoke she looked into his face in all tenderness. Tears were in her voice—her words sounded in his ears like a moan. She laid a hand upon one of his own, and he felt how it trembled. He caught

her trembling hand and held it passionately to his heart.

“ My darling—my darling Mary ! ” he whispered, and again there was a passionate choking gasp in his voice. “ You will not force me to go away when I tell you that I heard the words which you said to the picture before you left it.”

“ Byron, Byron, what do you mean ? ” she cried almost piteously. “ You must not hold my hand so. It is not fitting—it is foolish—it is cruel, and I will not submit to it. Oh, Byron, what madness is this ? Why did you ever come to us ? Why was I such a fool as to look out of the coach window that morning ? That was the worst act of my life.”

“ The best—the best—the best ; for it brought me to your side, and there I found the heaven which I knew I was nearing, when I looked up from where I was lying and saw your dear face above me,” he said.

“ Madness—madness ; for God’s sake do not say anything more to me,” she cried, trying to force the animal she was riding to get in advance of his horse. He would not allow her to pass him. Both came to a standstill.

“ You think that I am a boy,” he said ; “ but I am a man. Ask yourself, Mary, if you do not know in your heart that the love I have for you is the love of a man for a woman. You know it, and you stood before the picture last night and said, ‘ I love him—I love him ’—I heard you, and now you will say those sweet words not to a picture but to a man who returns your love a thousand-fold. Mary, my Mary, you will say those words to me now, and we shall both be happy.”

She snatched her hands away from him and held them out of his reach. The expression on her face was almost one of terror.

“ A dream—you told me you dreamt it. How

could you know what I said in my dream?" she whispered. "Why do you enweb me with mystery? A dream! What is a dream? But how could we both have the same?—oh, I will not think of it any more. I have no head for mysteries. Love you—I love you? Oh, Byron, this is folly—sheer folly—a cruel madness! How could you ever think it possible that I—I should love you?"

"Why should you not? Why should not I love you?" he said, becoming more calm. "Is it because I bear the same name as the man who—"

"Oh no, no; that is nothing; but—surely—oh, surely you know that I—that I—"

Her voice faltered; her lips began to tremble as do the lips of an infant when on the brink of tears. She turned away her head, but not before she had given him one piteous glance.

"What should I know?" he said, with some measure of impatience. "I only know one thing, and that is enough for me; it is enough for both of us, Mary; I love you—you love me—that is one thing, not two things; we love—there is nothing else in the world—or the heaven, for us."

"There is something else for me," she said mournfully. Then she made an effort, she lifted her head up boldly, saying in a voice which was perfectly under command—

"Cousin Byron, you should have known—I thought that you knew—that I am not free; I have promised to love someone whom I met last year—I am to marry him in the spring."

He did not give any violent start when she had spoken. He looked at her as if he had not heard a word that she had said, or as if he was trying, but failing to grasp the meaning of her words. Then he became deathly pale. In her firmness of the moment she was able to watch him. He caught her eyes for an instant, and then he turned on his saddle and looked out over the wide stretch of country

that lay beneath him—"the living landscape and the wave of woods." He continued gazing out over the shallow valley in silence for a long time, as if they had ridden to the hill solely to enjoy the prospect. Mary Chaworth had become fully composed since she had made her confession to him. When she spoke to him there was no tremor in her voice.

"Dear Cousin Byron," she said, "we have been two good comrades, you and I. We have been as much together as if we were brother and sister. Surely you will not be the one to let our happy friendship—our affectionate friendship—be shattered because in a moment of excitement—of thoughtlessness—you fancied that—that—something else was possible—some other affection—perhaps a less enduring affection, Byron."

He wheeled round upon her in his saddle.

"You are to marry another man, and yet you dare not deny that I am the man whom you love," he said.

Her self-possession vanished in a moment.

"Spare me, Byron; oh, spare me; do not be so cruel—so unjust," she said.

"One of us has been cruel—unjust; I ask you if I have been that one, Mary?"

"I was to blame—I was to blame, I admit it, but—"

"Tell me if you dare that you do not love me."

She looked away from him. He saw the attempt that she was making to compose herself once more. Every moment that she spent over the effort was a moment of triumph to him. But so long a space passed before she succeeded, he ceased to pity himself, and began to pity her.

"My poor Mary!" he said; but before he had quite uttered the words, she was facing him.

"You insult me," she cried. "Pity? Did I ask you for your pity? What right have you to pity

me? Why should you pity me? Pity yourself, if you wish, for it is you who have need of it—you who have misunderstood the interest which I took in you—the affection which I freely gave you because I saw that you stood in need of it, on account of your temperament—on account of your unhappy surroundings—you mistook that for—for something quite different. Oh, just think of everything that has happened from the standpoint of someone of experience of the world. I do not mean to be cruel when I say what you know to be the truth, that if any of our friends were to hear of this—of my trying to talk to you so seriously, they would laugh, thinking of you only as a schoolboy—but they would laugh at me more heartily still. Oh yes, they would be convulsed, but then, they would shake their heads and say that at my age I should have known better than to talk to you as if you were a man. Oh, Byron, do not be angry with me for speaking such cruel words to you. I speak them because I am so fond of you, and I know that you will be less unhappy, detesting me for speaking them than you would be in cherishing a hopeless—hopeless—delusion."

He had not taken his eyes off her face all the time that she was speaking. But his expression was never the same from one sentence to another. Her words seemed to be as breaths of air, and his features as the surface of water on which they were playing on a day of varying lights and shadows. His lips quivered at moments, his forehead became lined, he flushed crimson, he paled, he shivered, he became livid, his eyes flashed and flamed, and then became dull and hard. Within a few minutes he underwent all the emotions that a man may experience in a lifetime. His temperament was that of an *Æolian* harp that is affected by every breath—sensitive, high-strung—and his features responded to every beat of his heart. She felt, watching his ever-changing face, as if she

were listening to a subtle musical piece modulating emotionally from key to key.

The result of the effort which she made was to leave her palpitating, and to leave him smiling, as though he had become a man of the world within the space of her speech.

“Poor Mary!” he said, with that shivering smile upon his face. “Poor Mary! I see the truth now; I see the effort that you have made on my behalf—and on your own. I see now that your anxiety for my going away is due to your mistrust of yourself. You know that I love you, and that you love me. You dare not trust me any longer near you. You think that, separated, I shall forgive, and you will forget. I tell you that you are too late—you are too late—your own true heart tells you that you are too late.”

“Look there,” she cried, pointing with her riding whip down among the woods. “Look there! That is the man whom I am going to marry in six months. That is the man, and he is coming here to meet me.”

She spoke eagerly; the words seemed to flash from her. Her face, pallid and anxious at first, became rosy and rigid. She was looking at the advancing figure on horseback, and her eyes were those of the commander of a troop of soldiers watching the movements of an enemy. She gazed down from the hill crowned with the trees. Her lips were parted; she was breathing quickly—audibly. Suddenly, she cast a glance behind her, just as the soldier might, in order to discover a tract of retreat—only for a moment, however, the next moment she had risen in her saddle, and was waving her riding gauntlets high in the air, crying aloud in the shrill notes of one who wishes one’s voice to travel far, the huntsman’s halloo when the object of the chase is run to earth. Three times she sent that note ringing through the still air.

The man on the horse, riding up the gentle declivity from the road, waved his hunting crop and returned the halloo !

Byron sat motionless on his horse. He was not a part of the picture.

CHAPTER XII

IT was under the white blossoms of a great thorn one morning in the following April that he read his letter—not for the first time. The shadow of the autumn, and the gloom of the winter had passed over the land. People had been talking everywhere of the approaching terror—Bonaparte. The victory of Trafalgar had been the one brilliant spot on the edge of the darkness, but out of the smoke and din of the battle, the grim spectre which had been hovering over Europe like the phantom of Pestilence in a picture, emerged, blackened by the fire of Nelson's guns, but still in the eyes of England the incarnation of Evil, and potent for mischief.

The woodland spaces over which Byron had looked from Diadem Hill had shrivelled from russet brown to gold, and later on had become sparsely black—massive trunks flinging forth frantic arms on every side, from which thousands of thread-like twigs etched the dull skies. Then there was a long snow, making the world a wonder to all who looked out upon it; and before it had wholly melted, the delicate green buds began to unfold themselves cautiously and coyly until the daffodils of March had drunk deep draughts of sunshine. Then, with ceaseless songs from bower and brake—a cascade of mingling melodies, flinging its pellucid streams to every breeze that blew—the emerald spring lay upon the land.

And now Byron, who had dreamed his dream with the autumn landscape before his eyes and the autumn atmosphere clinging with cold mist fingers about his

heart, was sitting beneath the genial snow of the hawthorn reading his letter.

It was not a farewell letter by any means. It looked forward, as well as back.

“ You will be at Newstead in a year or two, and we shall be at Annesley and Colwick, so that we shall be within reach of each other’s hands at all times. Dear, dear cousin, you know that I shall ever look forward to see you, to meet your hand, and, in holding it, to hold once more to my life at least one week of my past, which was made sweet with your friendship. Surely there is nothing so well worth the cherishing as friendship—such friendship as ours—I was going to add *was*, but now I write *is*—such friendship as ours is—yes, and ever shall remain, dear, dear Byron. We shall cherish this feeling between us, and I cannot doubt that we shall find it the sweetest part of our lives.

“ Only one more word to my dear Byron ; and this is to urge him to refrain from saying in too great haste what is a sorrow and what is a joy—what is a good thing to happen to us in our life, and what is an evil thing. I am not very old, but I have lived long enough to be made aware of this: something that happens to us we may be disposed at the time to think the greatest misfortune that could possibly overtake us, and to despair of life altogether on account of it ; but before a year has passed—sometimes before even a month—I have found out that it was not a misfortune, but a blessing. And the same thing has happened when I was overjoyed at what I believed to be one of Fortune’s good turns on my behalf. A day was often enough to change all my ideas on that particular point. Who are we that should presume to say that we know better than Heaven what things are for our good ?

“ That is all ; only let me implore of you to let your great consolation be (next to Heaven) in all moments of grief and disappointment, Poetry. Do

not cut yourself off from that which will help you to bear manfully the worst that life may have in store for you, and to help others in the world, who may read what you have written, to bear their burdens with bravery. I have a right to say this to you, have I not? Being, as you once said I was, your poetic godmother, I consider it my duty to keep your feet from straying into other ways. You are a poet—I am as certain of that as one can be of anything in this world. And, remember, that to be a poet is to be the greatest of all God's creatures.

“I do not say farewell, dear Byron, but Good-bye—in its full meaning—God be with you, my dear cousin, and with me. If God be with you, and also with me, then, indeed, shall we not be always together ?

“ MARY.”

“A poet—the greatest of all God's creatures—perhaps the greatest ; certainly the most miserable,” said Byron, still looking at the letter which lay on his knees, where he sat ; the sunlight breaking through the hawthorn blossoms, made a pattern on the paper of alternate light and shade. He saw that, and, seeing it with eyes of a poet, he said—

“That is my life—a page of brilliant light and sombre shadows. . . . After all, the design is traced, not by the splashes of sunshine, but by the shadows. That is what makes life interesting—yes, to the people who look on. . . . That is what it is to be a poet—to live for those who look on. That is what I shall live for from to-day—for the lookers-on. I should have lived for her only—caring for no one else—thinking only of what I could do for her, separated from the world that I hate ; but now I shall live for what the world can give me. I do not know what it can give me, but I know what it cannot give me.”

This genius, with the feelings of a man, was beginning to be conscious of the dictation of another force within him, namely, experience, whose function it is to play

the part of the worldly director of genius ; genius is its own spiritual director. A genius without experience of life is like a boat without a rudder. A genius with experience of life and the feelings of a man is a boat with a rudder and a steersman who is drunk half his time, and spends the other half getting off the rocks on which he has run his craft.

Byron stared down upon the paper on his knees ; and as he stared, it became, not a paper through which Mary Chaworth was speaking to him with the voice of an angel, but a warrant to him to taste of the world, and to tell the world what it tasted like ; it became a passport to the Pit, only written with a quill plucked from an angel's wing ; it became material for crumpling into wads for closing the ears of conscience.

Looking out where the boughs of his hawthorn canopy opened toward the Italian garden, he saw a figure smiling into his face. He was startled for a moment, but before he had risen and taken a step toward the jester, he knew what it was—the leaden figure of a satyr leering toward him out of the curve of an arch of clambering roses, only the roses were not yet.

He laughed, saying—

“ Brother—my elder brother, you are in search of me, and you have found me. I am ready—quite ready. We shall go off together, you and I, for a day in the woods, and I shall grow so like you that the fairies will take us for twins. You shall teach me all your knowledge—that particular knowledge which makes you smile the smile of a Scotch professor of Humanities. Perhaps, in time, I shall acquire that very smile. All that is demanded of a man in order to acquire it is that he should become a beast, and that is no inordinate demand to put upon even the best of us.”

The boy with the large eyes of the dreamer of dreams, and the Apollo curls of bright chestnut

clustering and curving over his forehead as the ripples of a fast-flowing stream wimple over a smooth pebble in their path, looked like a young god facing the satyr ; but even as he spoke his lips took something of the lewd, leering curve of the brute lips before him.

And then a loud laugh came from the leaden monster, startling the young god, for it was just the laugh that might be expected to come from that wrinkled face, bearded and horned like a he-goat, and with the ears of the wild asses that do quench their thirst other-where than at the water-brooks.

Another outburst of laughter—hoarser, and with a horrid modulation into a falsetto, came from the creature, and while Byron still remained startled, Vince showed himself from behind the pedestal.

Byron laughed, but not until the other was silent.

“ By my faith, Vince, you play the part of Pan to the life,” he said.

“ Your lordship flatters his most servile servant,” said the man. “ I saw you staring at our worshipful brother here, and I thought that I could give him a soul.”

“ You are the man who would make the god in your own image,” said Byron. “ And, lo, the god that you made turned out a devil when you had made him.”

“ Ay, but this poor devil was only a lord,” said Vince.

“ He and I have something in common—look at his feet,” said Byron. “ I’ll swear that if he were to walk it would be with my limp. But if I resemble him at the feet, you resemble him about the head ; you have the ear and the leer and the jeer of the satyr, Mr. Vince.”

“ And I find the three very human in combination, my Lord Byron,” said Vince. “ A very pleasing trio, like that delightful one in *Don Juan*, invented by Mozart, the master of melodies, human and divine.

But the truth is that his late lordship, my father and your father's uncle, found this particular piece of sculpture among the ruins of a portion of the Old Priory of Newstead—though what part it played in the ecclesiastical economy of the religious house it is difficult to say."

"Look at his horns and his feet," said Byron. "Do not they hint at an important personage in religious history?"

"No one could doubt it; but do you fancy that they needed to import a stone devil into a community of men—religious men, too? Don't you think that the nearest lay brother would be able to play the part well enough for them?"

"Why *lay* brother?" said Byron.

"Why *lay*, indeed!" laughed Vince. "Men are men, whether capped, cowled, or coroneted. When coroneted they usually rise to the dignity of devils. Anyhow, his lordship found the figure, and had it carried here¹ with a view to frighten trespassers off the grounds. It served its purpose admirably. So soon as it became known that his lordship had found it more economical to keep a devil than a dog, he had all the park to himself, and then, of course, the story got about that he had sold himself to the Evil One. Such a story! We have heard of fathers selling their offspring, but never of the offspring seeking to dispose of himself to his parent."

"It may get about, if they notice the resemblance between our feet, that I cultivated my style from this model!"

"That depends on your morals; there were poachers who averred that they had come upon his late lordship in the park, and that he had pointed ears and a cloven hoof. His lordship was delighted to attain to such a distinction."

"'Tis a pity we could not hear if the demon felt equally flattered by the resemblance."

"He would have a right to be flattered did it reach his pointed ears that he was ever taken for you. I wonder where you got that Antinous head that you wear. Had the Admiral a curly head? I have only seen his portrait with a wig. Your own dad was as impudent as Apollo, without his curls or accomplishments. I ask your pardon. I apologise for Apollo. I recollect that you only agreed to come here on condition that I refrained from affronting your memories."

"You would do well to remember that, Mr. Vince. I made you understand that no word of affront respecting my father or mother must pass your lips."

"Have I not been careful hitherto? In spite of an almost irresistible temptation, have I yet done worse than to compare Mad Jack to the god Apollo? And yet, the opportunity was afforded me of comparing him to Marsyas the satyr, who was more impudent even than Apollo, only he went too far one day, and—by the Lord Harry, I marvel that it never occurred to an inventive sculptor of the Doric province to make a figure with the head of Apollo and the feet of a Pan! Psha! Of course, you know that I am not so brutal and so idiotic to boot—don't think that I aim at a cheap pun—as to suggest even in a far-off way, that you—your feet are like men's feet—with a difference of about an eighth of an inch—they in no way resemble the hoof of a Pan. No, I flatter myself that I am apt, whatever else I may be. But do not you think that Apollo, with the ear of a wild ass, and the foot of a goat—"

"I believe that if the devil became a sculptor that would be his first work."

"It would be a masterpiece, beyond doubt. But he never works in marble—not even in lead; he finds that human clay is a much more plastic medium."

"Only it doesn't last so long. What about our ride?"

Vince looked at his watch critically. He seemed to be making a brief mental calculation, and then he said—

“ I have ordered the horses for eleven o’clock—that is, ten minutes from now. You will draw on boots—you have just time.”

Byron went into Vince’s cottage within the grounds of Newstead, where he had been staying for some days. Lord Grey de Ruthven, the tenant in Chancery of Newstead Abbey, had, on returning to England and learning that the young Lord Byron had made an unannounced attempt to enter the mansion, sent a courteous message to inform him that instructions had been given to the servants to place at the disposal of his lordship a set of rooms, and trusted that his lordship would honour his humble tenant by making use of them freely and at his pleasure. This courteous expression of paradox Byron acknowledged from his rooms at Trinity College, Cambridge, thanking Lord Grey de Ruthven for his gracious message, and expressing the hope that during the summer he would be permitted to trespass on his lordship’s hospitality for a night or two.

Meantime, however, Vince, the man whose hospitality Byron had once had an opportunity of measuring for an hour or two, had come in contact with him again, and had offered him an apology for his too great freedom of speech upon the previous occasion that they had met, and Byron, accepting his apology, had been curiously attracted to him once again. The sardonic humour—the mordant cynicism of the man found an echo in Byron’s mood at that time; for he differed from most sensitive young men only in being able to make a brilliant response to a rebuff. While others were compelled to be content to feel chastely severe upon a world that holds someone vulgar enough to hurt their sense of their own dignity, Byron soon found himself with a lash of scorpions in his hand, which he wielded upon the world in general and

upon certain of its writhing inhabitants in particular. He emulated, and not without success, the achievement of his master, Apollo, upon the Satyr, Marsyas, which had been appreciatively mentioned by Vince; and in the course of a year or two a good many Marsyases who had offended him were crawling about with raw flesh.

He found in Vince a congenial companion upon occasions for some weeks before returning to Cambridge; and when, the following Easter, he paid a visit to his mother at Southwell, and had his customary quarrel with her, it was not to the mansion at Newstead he fled, but to Vince's cottage; and there he had remained for a week, previous to receiving Mary Chaworth's letter, which he read beneath the snowy boughs of the hawthorn.

In ten minutes the horses had been brought round to where the carriage drive met the carefully masked winding track leading to the cottage.

"What direction to-day?" asked Byron, when they had mounted.

"I hear that Gorleston banks are a sight with primroses," said Vince. "We have not yet been there, and a primrose bank is nearly as untrustworthy as one whose basis is guineas of the same colour."

"Good!" cried Byron. "We shall become innocent Wordsworthians for the day. Heavens! Vince, can you tolerate his puerilities?"

"I am easily tolerant when I see another man making himself ridiculous," said Vince. "Wordsworth always seems to me to be like a child playing with a plaster lamb in the open air. He thinks that, because he takes you with him into the open air, you will accept his Noah's ark as real."

"And Coleridge picks up his toy donkey and its foal and fancies that you will back them for the laureate stakes," said Byron. "By the god Phœbus, Vince, there is more poetry in this than in all Wordsworth!"

He put his horse at a low bank porcupined by a

hedge of straight privet, and went over it and into the spacious meadow beyond. He had galloped half a mile across the turf before he drew rein, allowing Vince to come up to him.

“That is the ideal way of going through with an argument,” said Vince. “You announce your proposition and then gallop off before one can point out its fallacy to you. Could anything be more ridiculous than to draw a comparison between the innocent iambics of the poet and the galloping anapests of a young Arab steed?”

“Nothing indeed,” said Byron. “The one warms up your blood; the other leaves you cold and unmoved. Hush, what metre is it that those church bells are ringing—can you hear them?”

They pulled up their horses on the rising ground, and listened. A lark sprang up from the grass close to them, and soared aloft, singing in ecstasy, and a second from where the land dipped toward the little river; but above their quivering notes there floated through the clear morning air a joyous peal of bells, varying in distinctness with every breeze, and every breeze that came to them laden with sound was laden with scent—the dewy perfume of the spring meadow-land.

“Those are the bells of Gorleston,” said Vince. “The people are very proud of them, and they lose no opportunity of letting the waiting world learn how full-toned they are. But the world is cruel; people have been heard to affirm that the fact of every bell-ringer being provided with a full quart of beer when he goes on duty in accordance with the terms of the benefaction of the bells, has got something to do with the devotional ardour in the belfry.”

“There is more ringing going on,” said Byron. “I can hear a wavering jingle from another steeple.”

They sat motionless on their horses in the attitude of attentive listeners. The air throbbed with the sound of the joy bells coming from the two distant

churches, and quivered with the ecstasy of the larks overhead.

"Some joyful event has happened," said Byron. "Can it be that Bonaparte has shot himself?"

"Or that the Prince has been poisoned by some true patriot?" suggested Vince.

"The villagers have no sense of proportion," said Byron. "They would ring just as heartily if one of their curates was getting married as if Paris was entered by the Allies."

"Let us get down to the road; we may find that something of importance has happened," said Vince.

They walked their horses down the gentle slope, among the clumps of primroses to where the coach road twisted round the high bank that stood like a headland at the bottom of the woods, and then went on to Annesley Hall in a straight line. The village church was half a mile away in the other direction.

"'Tis a wedding, after all, and of the parson's daughter," said Vince when they had halted their horses at the long, green hedge overlooking the road. He pointed with his whip to the lines of school children dressed in white garments, and at a befitting distance, the double row of the charity girls wearing their red cloaks and white straw bonnets. All carried baskets of primroses and bluebells and other spring flowers, and a garland of the same was festooned between the trees across the road. The children were chattering and craning their heads beyond the ranks in which they stood, in the direction of the church.

"Only the wedding of a parson's daughter would call for such a display of duty and devotion," continued Vince. "Hallo, what has happened to you, my lord?"

"Happened to me?" said Byron. "What should have happened to me?"

"Nothing, only you have become as pale as a ghost—as pale as if you were going to be married yourself."

“ You are a fool ! ” said Byron. “ I am no more pale than you are. What do I care if—if—if all the parsons’ daughters in the county are getting married to all the curates ? But I think there is a chill in the air—I have felt it now and again. I am going to have a canter to bring back the blood to my face.”

Vince gave a loud laugh.

“ What,” he cried. “ Have you had a rebuff already, that you now cannot trust your nerves to sustain you against so embittering a pageant as a bridal party ? Oh, fie, my Lord Byron ! You will set us all thinking strange things. And I gave you credit for being a man ! ”

“ What a fuss you make over nothing ! ” said Byron, with irritation. “ Good heavens, man, why should not I go away if I like, or stay if I like ? What the deuce are your parsons’ blowsy daughters to me ? ”

“ Nothing ; therefore it would be folly for you to run away at this time,” said Vince. “ There is really nothing to be afraid of. Let the galled jade wince ; our withers are unwrung, my lord.”

“ Psha ! There is no question of being afraid,” said Byron. “ Lud, Vince, do you suppose that I fear that the vicar has a second blowsy daughter yet undisposed of, whom he may insist on my marrying before noon ? ”

“ It is no vicar’s daughter that is being married to-day. Now that I come to think of it, ‘tis the wedding-day of your distant cousin, Miss Chaworth, to Mr. Musters, of Colwick. How could I have forgotten it ? How could you have forgotten it, considering that you are among the bride’s relations—ay, and considering also that you were so recent a guest at Annesley Hall, and that you and Miss Chaworth enjoyed so many excursions on horseback together in the autumn ? It would never do for you to run away just when the cavalcade is in sight, my Lord Byron ; though doubtless there are many people who will ask how it is that you are not in one of those

carriages—not the foremost, of course—that is the carriage of the bride and bridegroom—it would be absurd to think of your occupying a seat in that carriage, would it not? But—ah, here they come. Oh no, you are not pale any longer—quite the contrary. Here they come. Oh, those children! What an epithalamium!"

There was an appearance of outriders in the distance in the Chaworth livery, followed by a carriage with four white horses, ridden by postilions in silver-braided waistcoats—the sunlight was gleaming upon these. The school children, under the time-beating forefinger of a young lady,—she was the vicar's daughter, who had a genius for organisation,—had begun to lilt an old English melody to the verses written for the occasion by the schoolmaster, and were grasping their bunches of flowers with that firmness necessary to turn them into successful projectiles. On the bank, and among the twisted snakes of the exposed roots of an undermined elm, ruddy dairymaids and rubicund farm-labourers sat, or squatted, or swung, and began to cheer early, until the parson's daughter held up a protesting hand, not without a suspicion of chiding.

"Children to the fore!" was the cry that appealed to the sense of fair play of the elders, and the epithalamium slurred its course into the bright air. The schoolmaster, wearing the conscious smile of the approved poet, stood retired behind the hedge of willows to mark the effect of his poem. He became irritated at the omissions, substitutions, and mispronunciations of his interpreters.

The outriders trotted up, and then no power had any control over the labourers—they cheered, the children yelled, the dogs barked, the infants in their mothers' arms wailed.

There she sat in the open carriage by the side of—her husband; he had been her husband for the space of a quarter of an hour. She was as pale as the orange

blooms that clustered about the diamonds fastening her lace veil ; but there was a smile upon her face when she came among the white school children. The carriage went slowly while the wildflower tributes were flung into the air, and fell about the carriage, some upon the pink coat of the bridegroom, and some upon the bright hair of the bride. They were dislodged by her bowing, but then they rested on the white lace, giving it the appearance of an embroidery in yellow silk. She bowed to the school children, speaking the names of some of them ; then she lifted her eyes to the high bank where the men and maids were cheering, with much waving of handkerchiefs. Suddenly she looked at the other side, and saw the two horsemen beyond the hedge. If she felt surprised, she did not show it. The lovely whiteness of her face—the white of the damask rose—did not change, her lips parted for an instant while she looked at Byron, as if she were speaking a word to be heard by herself alone. She kept her eyes fixed upon him, and he saw, the moment that she smiled, the ineffable depth of their sadness. He took off his hat, she inclined her head, and then made a motion with one of her hands ; it seemed as if she had meant to wave her hand, but changed her mind at the last moment.

That was all. The carriage drove on, the husband bowed to right and left, the epithalamium became a riot, and a milkmaid and her swain, who had ventured too close to the crumbling ledge of earth, slipped and rolled down the bank clutching at each other, to the detriment of their holiday clothes. Thus the carriage rolled away in a roar of laughter.

Byron watched the passing away of the vehicle. He could see the shimmer of the white lace that only covered a part of the bright hair so long as the carriage remained in view ; and, watching it, he thought of the night when he had seen the flight of meteors. So that was what it meant, after all ; the golden star with its

trail of light which had moved before his eye across the sky had been a symbol of the floating away of that star of golden light into another world than that which it had made gracious for a short time. She had gone out of his world, out of his life, leaving darkness where the light of her presence had once shone.

He felt that there was nothing but darkness for him so long as he lived, when that gleam of gold waned away into the distance, and his eyes were staring into a blank, blue space of sky where the road made its turn, and the carriage disappeared. He had not yet parted with the thought that she loved him, but the cherishing of it gave him no comfort—on the contrary, it made him feel all the more bitterly of a world in which such things were possible as a girl's sitting as a bride by the side of one man, while all the time she loved another. He felt that he did right to despair of such a world, and to hope that he would be spared the degradation of living in it.

And then he sounded that deepest depth of despair which cries out a perpetual "Why? why? why?" Why could not he have met her three months sooner than he did? Why should she have given her promise to that man before she had met the one whom she loved and who would ever love her? "Why? why? why?" That voice gnawed at his heart all the time that he watched her, and long after she had disappeared in the distance. And the worst of all the questions that came to him was the fierce demand why he had not insisted on her breaking her promise to the other man when he found out that she loved, not the other man, but himself? Why had not he carried her away by night? This youth of imagination felt, at the thought, the arms of the girl tight about his body, while he fled with her behind him on the saddle, into the night—into a land where Love alone was lord. Yesterday—last night—why had he not done it

then ? It was time enough then ; but now it was too late. He had had the agony of seeing her pass away from him, and it was the other man who would know the delight of feeling her sweet hands clasping him. It was too late—he had lost her, and his life was over.

He had the sensation of dreaming a dream in which he had the feeling that it was a dream—that the agony of it all was only visionary—that in a few moments he would awaken and know that the bitterness had no real existence. He watched as in a sleep the passing of the train of carriages—he heard the cheers of the tenantry—but he never felt that they were real.

It was the voice of the man who was on the horse beside him that awoke him.

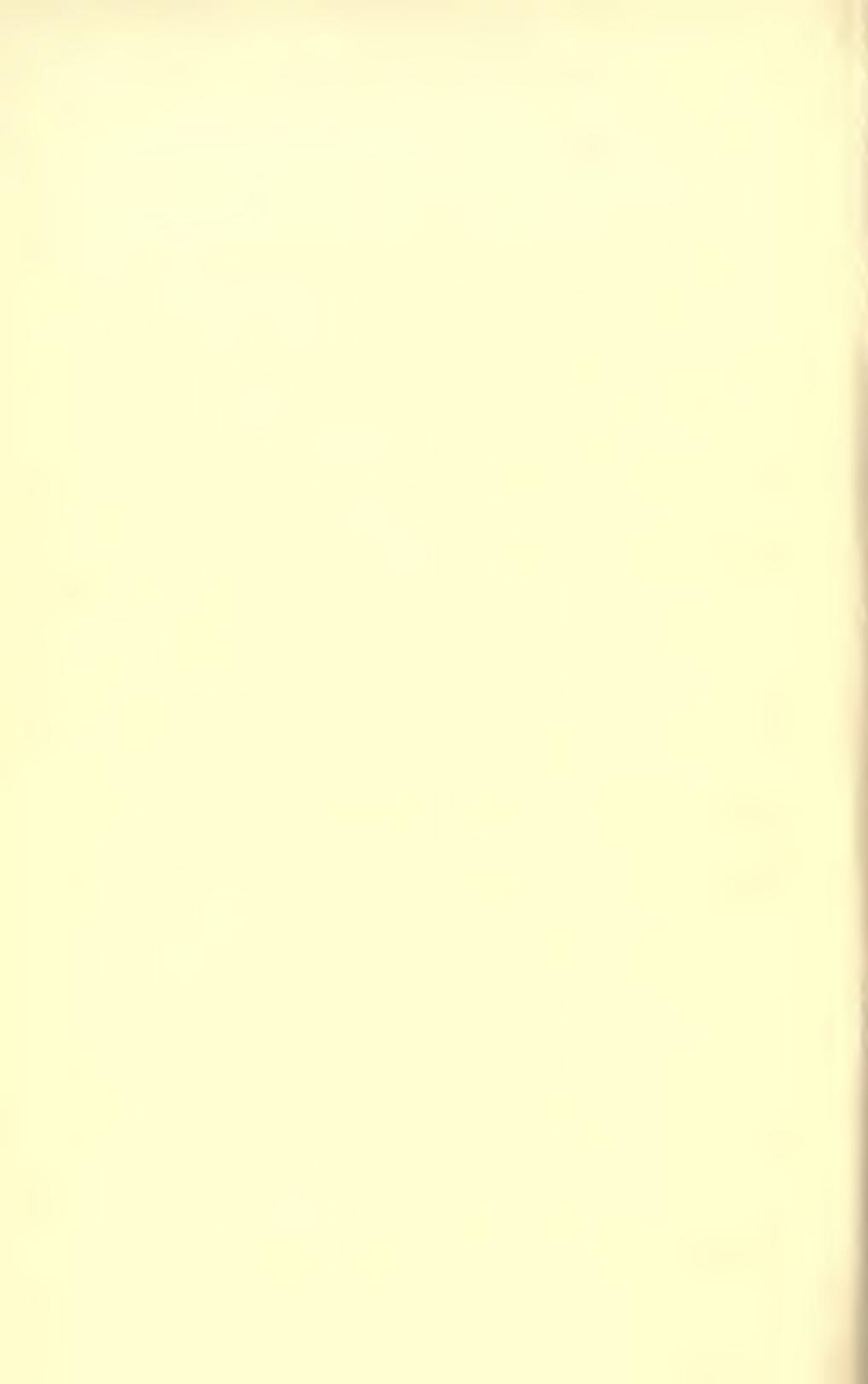
“ That is all there is to be seen, my Lord Byron,” he said. “ The rest of the entertainment is not for such as you and I. I was generous toward her to-day. I did not deprive her of the satisfaction of knowing that we were witnesses of her triumph. A young woman’s cup of happiness is never full unless she knows that the men whom she rejected have witnessed her in her hour of triumph. She saw us.”

Byron turned to him with an astonished inquiry in his eyes.

“ Oh yes ; I knew that you loved her. I, too, loved her for a while,” said Vince in response. “ She knew it, though I never was fool enough to confess it to her. But you were not quite so reticent, my lord. You confessed and she laughed at you. You were a fool for your pains. Here we are on the same level at last ; the head of the family and the wretch barred out of the family by the bar sinister. Love levels all ; so does rejection. Give me your hand, man, never think that all joy has died out of the summer because the rose we loved has been plucked by another hand than ours. You will find your path

strewn with roses, and you may gather them by the score. Come with me. We shall post to London to-day, and our cry will be—”

“Forget,” said Byron. “That will be my word—forget.”



PART THE SECOND



CHAPTER I

MR. KEMBLE was to act the part of the Duke of Gloster at Covent Garden Theatre, and there were few unoccupied seats in the house.

“Has he appeared yet?” asked a young lady in a voice of tremulous anxiety of her neighbour in the boxes on hurrying to her place.

“Not yet; the curtain is still down,” was the reply.

“So I perceive; but he may appear before the play begins, and I should die were I to miss seeing him.”

The other lady stared at her, and said—

“Lud! my dear, how could you hope to see Mr. Kemble before the play begins? You should have betaken yourself to the stage door.”

The girl returned the stare of her friend.

“Kemble—Mr. Kemble, who is Mr.?—Oh, to be sure, he is the actor. Is he in the play to-night? Of course, I remember now; he does the part of Richard or Hamlet, or someone; nobody wants to see him; we have all come to gaze at Childe Harold.”

“I think the town has gone mad over your Lord Byron,” said the other. “One hears nothing else but ‘Byron, Byron, Byron,’ varied by ‘Childe Harold, Childe Harold, Childe Harold.’ I never thought it possible that a poet—a mere poet—could so upset—”

“There he comes,” cried the girl.

“Where—where? Why will those odious people stand up so as to shut out my view?” cried the elder lady, jumping to her feet and vainly endeavouring to look over the heads of some people who stood

between her and the door, around which there was a crowd. "Was there ever anything so tiresome? I cannot catch a glimpse. Heavens! he will be in his box before I have a chance!"

She was shrill—almost tearful—in her complaints, craning her head forward one moment, and the next leaning to one side—dodging the feathery trophy which crowned her neighbour—stooping, so as to take advantage of a temporary vista that promised much—swooping, with the quick drop of a hawk, down upon the lorgnette that lay on the arm of her chair, apparently hoping that the glass would enable her to see through the solid phalanx that interfered with her vision.

"Psha!" she said, resuming her seat with a swish and a pout. "Psha! 'tis not he after all—'tis only the Regent."

The younger lady laughed with dainty malice.

"You poor soul!" she said. "You have caught the fever rather more acutely than the worst of us; and you were so ready to reprove me! Oh, fie, Sophia!"

In every other part of the playhouse equal alertness was displayed to that shown by these ladies.

"If we only knew which box he is going to, we should be prepared," said an anxious angular lady in pink to her sister in blue. They were middle-aged maidens with a limited income between them. Their dinners would be meagre for weeks through their indulgence in the extravagance of the theatre; but they could not resist it: they had been reading "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage."

"Ah, if we only knew!" echoed the other. Then, putting her thin lips close to her sister's ear, she whispered—

"Do you think that we might inquire of the gentleman in front of you, Theodosia? He looks well-bred."

"Araminta, how could you be so bold?" whispered Theodosia, raising her thin, mitten hands.

" My dear sister, he might not make the attempt to take advantage of our temerity," said Miss Araminta. " We could be cold to him immediately after. Suppose we fix our eyes on the wrong box, dear ? "

A little further conversation and consultation, and the elder lady bent forward to the gentleman, saying in her most highly bred voice—

" May we presume to inquire of you, sir, if you know which of the boxes Lord Byron will occupy ? "

The gentleman turned round.

" Madam, I neither know nor care," he said firmly. " I came to see Mr. Kemble as the Duke of Gloster on the stage, not Jack in the box or your Byron in the box, or anyone else in a box, and if you will take my advice, you will do the same, madam."

The ladies looked at each other, their thin lips firmly closed. They were ladies of spirit. They refused to be rebuked by any stranger.

" Sir," said Miss Theodosia, " we asked you for information, not advice. The former we fancied you might be able to give us, the latter we are capable of giving to you, should you desire it, on the subject of good manners."

The accents of precision travelled far ; there were titters to right and left. The ill-bred man glared at the maiden sisters, and then at the titterers.

" Madam," said a young man leaning forward, " my Lord Byron, the greatest poet of this or any other age, will occupy the second box from the stage on the opposite side, with Mr. Thomas Moore, the Irish melodist."

" We thank you, sir," said Miss Araminta. " We are pleased with your information, but more by the knowledge that politeness toward ladies is not quite extinct."

" Blues ! " whispered one man to his neighbour in the next row. " You can tell by their accent that they belong to the Blues."

" A dangerous follow this Byron, sir—a rank sceptic,

if not worse—an infidel—an atheist. They say that he is at heart a Turk," said a man in the pit to the one sitting next to him.

"Ay, at heart—most of us in England are so to-day, from those living in Carlton House—"

"His Royal Highness would have made a capital Sultan beyond doubt; but, 'tis one thing to be a Sultan, and quite another to be an infidel."

"Is that theology?"

"Undoubtedly, sir; there is the case of David, the King of Jerusalem. He was the man after God's own heart, and wrote the Book of Psalms; so that the numerous—his numerous—lapses were forgiven him."

"He counted them by the thousand; Abishag the Shunamite was the last. Our new poet seems to have much in common with David, including his lyrical gifts. You have read 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' sir?"

"Not I, sir; I would not willingly read a poem by an infidel."

"He admits frankly that at his ancestral home he was foremost in orgies," said a young man with large eyes to an elder with spectacles and a twinkle behind each lens.

"He made orgying an art and excessing a science—that is why we all envy him to-day," said he.

"I do not," said the youth. "I shudder at the thought of an orgy."

"I don't—unless it be an orgy of poetry, or an orgy of priggishness. I take a poet to be a bit of a man, and this fellow seems to be something of a man, though not so much so as the poet that speaks to-night—our Shakespeare—"

"I was disappointed in 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' on the whole. I counted six false rhymes in the first canto alone."

"Off with his head—so much for Byron," said the man with the spectacles, anticipating—with a change

—the phrase with which Mr. Kemble would electrify the house in an hour or two.

“Can he really be so wicked as people say?” a young wife asked of her husband.

“Oh yes; a man can always manage to be as bad as people say, but, as a matter of fact, he rarely is,” replied her husband.

“And you think that Lord Byron is really and truly wicked?” she said in an awed whisper.

“Is not everybody in the theatre on tiptoe of curiosity to see him? Do you think that virtuous people would be in that state for any reason except to see an extremely wicked young man?” asked her husband, smiling tolerantly.

“Oh, but a poet,” suggested the wife.

“Well, Pye is a poet—Poet Laureate, and yet people don’t crowd the theatre to catch a glimpse of Pye. Take my word for it, Lord Byron is a shocking young man.”

So the gossip went round the playhouse. No one was talking of Kemble; the great actor seemed to be regarded by the playgoers as filling a perfectly legitimate place in drawing people together to see Lord Byron. Kemble was accepted as a sort of high-class showman, whose business it was to give the public a chance of seeing that *lusus naturæ*—a peer who had written a great poem.

The hour for the beginning of the performance was already passed by five minutes, the Prince Regent had taken his seat in the Royal box, and was showing some impatience—worse than that, the occupants of the gallery were showing some impatience—at the delay in raising the curtain. A message from the Royal box to the stage met with a curt excuse. Mr. Kemble was obdurate. He did not mind about himself, he said to the anxious manager; it was for Shakespeare he trembled; he would not be a party

to such an insult as would be offered to Shakespeare were Lord Byron to enter the playhouse and draw away, as he certainly would, the attention of the audience from the stage. Considering that Mr. Kemble acted in Cibber's version of the play, he need not have been so punctilious for the honour of Shakespeare.

But Mr. Kemble was right ; for a few minutes later there was a movement among the vast audience—a movement and a whisper surging round boxes and pit and gallery—the sound that follows the opening of a sluice—a trickling whisper at first, swelling in tone and gaining in volume, until the whole house was in a seething whirl. It lasted an amazingly short time, considering its vehemence. But the hush that followed was infinitely more impressive than the clamour. Every eye in the house seemed straining to catch a glimpse of the young man with the marble brow and the auburn curls who was following, with scarcely a hint of a halting foot, the theatre attendant who was bowing his way to a box, followed by a short gentleman with a humorous Irish face—an eye that seemed constantly twinkling at the jest of the retroussé nose beneath it.

In another minute they had reached their box and seated themselves very quietly on the back chairs. With a sigh—the sigh of subsiding waters—the playgoers settled down into their places. There was a slight buzz of criticism, the flash of a smile flying round the faces in the boxes like a glint of sunshine over a garden on a day of fleecy flying clouds of April, and then with a cry of "order" from the disorderly parts of the house, the curtain rose, and the figures of Mr. Cibber's introduction began to talk. Mr. Kemble would not appear until the second act, with his soliloquy—

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York;

and so it was not thought discourteous to anyone—

unless to Cibber, and he didn't matter—to talk *sotto voce* in the boxes.

It was of Lord Byron that everyone whispered, and no one whispered of his poetry now: it was all very well to speak of his poetry before he had appeared; but since he had been seen, it was of his face that everyone talked.

“What a face!”—“the features that one sees on a Greek stone cameo”—“the face of a Greek god”—“the curls of the young Paris”—“what eyes! melting—mournful—mysterious”—“eyes with doom written large within their depths”—“and what a brow!—whiter than ivory-marble”—“and his neck”—

The brigade of dandies, with their necks enwound in ten yards of stiff cambric, held up their hands disdainful of the unstocked poet; but somehow his low, soft collar with a tie loosely fastened, so as to display the hollow of his throat, made them feel ashamed of themselves, and, of course, the more ashamed of themselves they were the more earnestly did they shrug their shoulders and talk of taste and tone. The tyranny of the impudent beau of the eighteenth century had been followed by the insolence of the dandy of the nineteenth. The beau had been a marvel of dignity and grace; the dandy was dowdy—clumsy in his ridiculous stock, and the mummings of superfluous coats and many waistcoats. Already the Byron collar was being adopted by young gentlemen of fashion who fancied they perceived a short cut to fame by adopting the dress of the most famous young gentleman of the age. Before “Childe Harold's Pilgrimage” had been published more than a week, society became overcrowded with Childe Harolds—young men affecting an air of dignified gloom, talking vaguely of remorse, and hinting at secret crime, and the hollowness of pleasure. They wore cloaks. They were an intolerable nuisance to their friends.

At the interval between the first and second acts, all lorgnettes were turned in the direction of the box

where Byron and Moore sat. Moore kept well to the front and waved his hand to his many friends in the house. He saw no reason why he should rest in the shade simply because he happened to be on terms of pleasant familiarity with a poet who was also a peer. He made a good-humoured foil for his friend. Moore was full in the light and greatly conspicuous, but Byron sat remote. Only now and again there was a gleam of the candlelight upon his features ; they stood out momentarily from the gloom, and lapsed into the gloom again. This was just the effect that was in keeping with the impression which his poem had made. An atmosphere—a twilight of mystery surrounded him. There he was—a thing of shadows, seen one moment and vanishing the next—silent—reserved—living in another world.

He never posed for an instant. He sat in the half light because he liked half lights, and he sat remote, because he had never quite got rid of his early shyness. He made no attempt to heighten the effect of his own personality. He knew that there was no need for him to do so : everyone in the theatre was looking in his direction, and when there was a gleam on his face, he could hear the whispers of startled delight that came from the lips of young women.

It was only when Lord Holland came to the box that he shifted his position, and began to talk with some degree of animation.

Mr. Sheridan, who was in a box with his friend Rogers, laughed pleasantly, when the latter said—

“ I do not think that I ever before saw so many young women in the theatre. Can you account for it ? ”

“ 'Tis the simplest thing in the world, sir,” said Sheridan. “ Virgo, the Maiden, follows Leo, the Lion, in Society as well as in the Zodiac.”

“ You think that they came in expectation of seeing Byron ? ” said Rogers.

“ Colman took good care to advertise his coming

to see Kemble to-night," said Sheridan. "'Tis such enterprise as this fills the house. Who is it that will traduce the taste of the English people and say that there is no genuine appreciation of Shakespeare in this country, when Kemble plays Richard to such a packed house? Ah, Shakespeare is very dear to the English people. All you have to do is to get the most popular man of the hour to accept a box and let the thing be properly announced, and Shakespeare will attract his thousands."

"Your committee will have to invite Lord Byron to Drury Lane when the theatre is rebuilt," said Rogers.

"What, in eighteen months' time? My dear sir, this comet called Byron will have been swallowed up by the sun long before the Phoenix shall have paid the last instalment of the fire insurance," said Sheridan. "We shall have to look out for something less meteoric."

"They say that Mr. Southey means to write you a play," said Rogers.

"Let him. I'll promise to produce it on whatever day Bonaparte agrees to take a box. Nothing less than the presence of Bonaparte in a box would draw the public to see a play by Mr. Southey," said Sheridan.

Rogers laughed.

"I am afraid then that Mr. Southey will remain unacted," he said.

"There's no need," said Sheridan. "If you only exert yourself, Mr. Rogers, I am confident that you will succeed in bringing about a reconciliation between Bonaparte and Great Britain. Look at what you have already accomplished. Some of us got hold of Moore a year ago and tried to persuade him that he had been grossly affronted by Byron in his Satire, and that it was necessary for him to send a challenge to his lordship. It was you with your infernal good-nature who asked them to breakfast with you, and so spoiled our laugh, and now Tommy and his lordship are inseparable. I' faith, sir, I believe that it was

your cursed interference that reconciled Lord Holland and the satirist. By my soul, sir, if Byron were to write of me as he did of the Hollands, I would have put a bullet through him, after I had borrowed from you as much as would pay for the lead. Your peace-making is becoming a scandal, Rogers. If you go on much longer you will be assassinated by the gun-makers. Give us a new edition of 'Pleasures of Memory' and tell us in proper order of the triumphs of your breakfast table."

Then the curtain rose upon the second act, and Kemble, hunch-backed and bow-kneed, limped upon the stage, the malignancy in his eyes being intensified when he found that the audience had not yet settled down after their interval of staring at Byron.

"You are not going away?" said Rogers, as Sheridan gave signs of departing.

"Kemble makes a good Gloster, but I have seen Garrick in the part," said Sheridan.

Rogers, with great seriousness, watched him leave. He shook his head after he had disappeared. He knew that it was not a matter of sentiment that took Sheridan away, but a matter of claret.

Before Kemble had come to the end of the soliloquy, he had his audience within the hollow of his hand; and he knew it. This was his triumph. The management had told him that he was sure of a good house, because they had advertised that Lord Byron would attend the performance of *Richard III.*, and he knew quite well that the poet would attract more attention than the stage—yes, for some time. But Kemble also knew that he had nothing to fear from the rivalry of Byron. He had a greater poet than Byron on his side—though he had no great confidence in the discrimination of the public on this point—and he had the power of the greatest actor alive on his side—there never was any doubt in Mr. Kemble's mind on this point, even when, a year later, a certain provincial actor named Kean filled the theatre, and

(according to Kean) gave Shakespeare a new lease of life. Of course, he triumphed. A rival! In every part of the theatre the people were hanging on his words, and the poet Byron was the most attentive of them all. He had come to the front of the box, and was leaning over the ledge, his head resting on his hand, drinking in every word spoken by that malignantly frank fiend who shuffled about the stage uttering his thoughts aloud. Kemble did not speak the soliloquy as if he were making a speech to his audience. He spoke it disjointedly—musingly. He was frank only with himself; the triumph of his art was to convey to his audience the impression that they had been accidentally let into the secrets of the mind of the man before them. They felt this, and they also felt that it would never do for them to miss a single word that was spoken on the stage. No one looked in the direction of Byron, and he never turned his eyes away from the stage. Mr. Moore was beginning to fear that, after all, Mr. Kemble might have the best of it. If the playgoers insisted on giving all their attention to the stage, his friend the poet would have reason to complain of their neglect, and—worst of all—the peer's friend would remain unobserved.

CHAPTER II

AT the next interval Lord Holland visited Byron in his box, but as there were half a dozen other persons of distinction there, he only remained for a few minutes to mention that Madame de Staël had promised to attend Lady Holland's reception that night, solely to have an opportunity of making his, Byron's, acquaintance. Of course, Byron affirmed that he had never before been so greatly flattered.

"I feel as if I had just engaged myself to meet Homer's *Iliad* in the original," said he. "Somehow I cannot think of Madame de Staël except as an abstraction, like the Meridian of Greenwich or the Equator. I cannot think of her as existing in the flesh."

"When you see her, you will not be in any doubt as to the flesh," said Sheridan, who had just entered the box, and found it convenient to lean against one of the columns.

"That is comforting," said Byron. "One is never quite at one's ease with abstractions."

"Except of virtue," said Moore.

"And bigotry," said young Mr. Dallas, nodding toward Sheridan.

But Sheridan had passed the moment when he could recall his Mrs. Malaprop. He had slid down his pillar into a chair and had fallen asleep in a second.

"The maker of 'Corinne' cannot be thought of as an abstraction of bigotry—so much is sure," said Byron; "and as regards the other—abstraction—"

"Ah, you will see her and form your own conclusions," said Lord Holland.

"The most satisfactory way of judging," said Moore.

"What," cried Byron; "the most satisfactory way of finding out if the contents of a phial are poison—swallowing them? Oh, my dear Moore!"

"There's something in that," said Lord Holland. "But we were talking of a lady writer, not of poison."

"Your lordship draws a very nice distinction," said Sheridan, who seemed to awake only to utter the phrase; he was asleep before the others had ceased laughing.

"I would rather hear what Sheridan says when in his sleep than what the next witty man living says when at his best," whispered Lord Holland.

"Alas!" said Dallas, "that such a man should fritter his life away in politics!"

"And that Whig politics into the bargain. Alas! alas!" said Byron, smiling at Lord Holland.

"The unsuccessful side. Alas! alas! alas!" said Lord Holland.

"If Lord Byron continues making speeches equal in eloquence to his first, we may look for a change in this respect," said Moore, with great seriousness.

"There's an Irish brogue in Moore's smile," said Byron. "You never know when the rascal is talking bam; and, like others of his nation, he is never so flippant as when he is most serious."

"He spoke good sense just now, whether or not it was his intention to do so," said Lord Holland.

"Oh, fie, my lord!" cried Moore. "Do you suggest that I sometimes talk sense as Sheridan talks wit, unwittingly?"

"His lordship drew attention to the fact that you spoke sense—once," said Byron. "And, perhaps, he was right, though for myself I cannot agree with him, through lack of experience."

"Now you know very well that you made a fine

speech, Byron," said Dallas. "Did you not tell me that you had made the Chancellor angry?"

"So much at least must be placed to my credit," laughed Byron. "After all, that seems to be the be all and the end all of political parties: to make your opponents angry."

"And to keep His Royal Highness in a good humour," whispered Lord Holland, with the suggestion of a nod in the direction of the Royal box. The Regent was laughing heartily at something which had been said to him by a prominent member of the Government, who was standing beside his chair.

"I hear it is becoming a more difficult task every day," said Moore.

"And yet his laureate is said to submit an ode to him every week," remarked Dallas.

"If that is the truth we can quite understand why His Royal Highness should feel glum," said Lord Holland.

"What is the good of being in the place of a King if one is compelled to submit to a course of odes?" said Byron. "I am convinced that His Royal Highness has made a point of seeing the play to-night in order to learn something of the methods of his illustrious ancestor in ridding himself of superfluous wives and poets and hangers-on of that sort."

"Whatever Gloster may have done it is not on record that he ever murdered a poet," said Dallas.

"My sense of fair play would cause me to place such an act to his credit if I could but remember it," said Byron. "Never mind; our Prince may perceive that it devolves on him to go beyond Richard—if he have not done so already."

"For Heaven's sake!" whispered Lord Holland, holding up his hand. "No scandal about Queen Elizabeth—eh, Sherry?"

Mr. Sheridan had suddenly awakened. There was on his face a puzzled look; he seemed trying to recollect where he had heard the quotation.

"Garrick told me that before playing the part of Gloster he invariably ate an underdone beefsteak and drank a pint of port," he muttered. "When he heard that Barry thought of following his example he said, 'Quite right; only he had better begin on an ox roasted whole.'"

"I have felt quite equal to murder after a single pork chop," said Byron.

"Some natures need only so small a spur in that direction, whereas there are others so lethargic that they might eat a whole ox and drink a hogshead of brandy, and yet allow a *Quarterly Reviewer* to live," said Dallas.

Mr. Rogers, sitting in his box opposite, tried to give all his attention to Mr. Coleridge's criticism of Kemble's acting. He had no particular wish to know where Kemble was wrong and where he was right; when Kemble was on the stage he ceased to criticise; he felt; and feeling turns criticism out of doors. He knew, however, that Mr. Coleridge was anxious to unburden himself, and so he submitted. But he had his eye on the other box. He knew that they were not standing on tiptoe with a tape to take the measure of Kemble.

Coleridge would have gone on for half the night flourishing his critical tape measure, and yet never getting it higher than Kemble's knees, but happily he was stopped, not by the rising of the curtain, but by Mr. Rogers' protest when the new act began. Coleridge, the true critic, believed that what he had to say about the performance was greater than the performance itself. It certainly would have been longer.

It was not to see the Prince Regent escorted to his chariot with all ceremony by the manager and his men, that the crowd blocked the way. It was not even to see the lovely Countess of Jersey glittering in diamonds as she tripped out between the lamps; it was to catch a glimpse of the young lord whose name was on every tongue.

The old Duke of Bedford, who recollected the impression produced by the beautiful Miss Gunnings when they first came to town, affirmed that their triumph was not greater than that achieved by the new poet. His Grace cursed the degeneracy of the moderns, who made all this fuss about a poet—a mere poet. In the case of the Miss Gunnings there was some reason for the excitement: they were beautiful women, though for his own part he preferred girls with more flesh on their bones—that, his Grace admitted, was only a matter of taste; but for men and women to run after a fellow simply because he had written a poem—could anything be more preposterous? Could anything show more plainly that the country was going to the deuce?

“It’s marvellous to what excesses people will go in the first flush of the discovery that it is possible for a peer to have brains,” was the explanation of the phenomenon offered with great respect by Colonel Clifford; and a few people who heard it admitted that there might be something in it.

But whether Clifford’s theory or the Duke’s contention that the moderns were hopelessly degenerate, was right, the fact remained indisputable: until Lord Byron’s chariot had driven off, the streets continued blocked by people, young and old, straining to catch a glimpse of the new poet about whom so many strange stories were told. Even when the carriage had driven away it carried with it quite a long train of young men and women, peering round the panels as they tried to keep up with the horses, in hopes of catching sight of his face with the light of the street lamps on it.

“This is fame indeed,” said Moore.

“No doubt of it,” said Byron. “How is it that people have only begun to run after you within the month? Surely the ‘Post Bag’ was to their taste; or have they only now discovered that the Irish Melodies are the most melodious verses ever written by an Irishman? Ah, Thomas Little or Thomas

Moore, or whatever you have a mind to call yourself, could you but know the effect that the singing of your 'Minstrel Boy' had upon me on one night of my life—the most memorable night of my life! That impression has not been quite rubbed off, in spite of the years that have jostled past me, and the hob-goblins which have rubbed against me in my way through the Slough of Despond, which you call the world."

"And by Heaven," cried the Irishman, "I would rather hear that from you than be run after by all the crowds in Christendom. That is the truth, by Heaven!"

"And by Heaven," said Byron, "I would rather hear one man say to me, 'You have taught me to feel,' than all the cheers of the mob. Do you think that I am carried away by all the signs which I have had of the curiosity of these poor fools who are running after us? You will not do me the injustice of thinking that I look on this as fame. Don't you suppose that I can estimate it at its proper value? Poetry? What do these people know about poetry or care for poetry? I am in their eyes the murderer of the moment. They are just as anxious to catch a glimpse of a wretch on the way to Newgate as they are to see me, and the same crowd that cheers me to-day may hiss me to-morrow. God do so to me, and more also, if I ever so far forget myself as to take this mob into account when I sit me down to do my work in the world. May the worst happen to me if I ever set about writing to gain the applause of the crowd!"

"No one except a fool would accuse you of having written a single line hitherto with that intent," said Moore. "And no man living would remain so little moved one way or another by the triumph which you have achieved."

"I know exactly how much I have done," said Byron. "I know that if I am a poet it is because

I cannot help it. I heard the voice you have heard, calling to me out of the deep, even as it called to you ; and I was compelled to answer to its call—as were you. I have sung a song, and I only know how true it is—how false it is—how much it reveals—how much it conceals—of the truth. But when I see those people running after me I think of that marvellous sight which I saw on the night before I found out what that voice was which had called to me—it was the night of the great display of meteors, and my Scotch superstition has had weight to make me believe that my course is to be that of a meteor—a wild flare lasting a short time, and then—a burst, and—silence. Well, my ambition does not ask for anything different from this. The flare-up has come—look at that boy with the link at Lord Holland's—it makes a brave show now ; but wait—ah, he has thrust it into the extinguisher—pah ! the fastidious folk in the Square hold their noses aloof from the smell. My dear Moore, you will live to see people turn away their heads when my name is mentioned."

" Not I," said Moore. " You—a meteor—a torch ! Take my word for it, Childe Harold is a fixed star—in the Galaxy of the new century it is a second Sirius. If you go on for another year or two you will have a complete constellation to yourself."

" Ay, the unstable constellation of a shower of meteors—I know it."

The carriage crawled into the place vacated by Lady Jersey's—there was still a line of carriages, reaching from St. James's Square to Pall Mall—and even here Byron was recognised by the stragglers who were peering through the lines of lamps and links at the distinguished guests at Lady Holland's reception.

When the name of the Right Honourable Lord Byron was passed from lackey to lackey up to the doors of the great salon, there was a hush in the conversation that had buzzed from staircase to reception-room, so that he entered between the pillars of a

stately silence, so to speak. That was how Lord Melbourne put it—somewhat fantastically, no doubt, but making an honest attempt to find an equivalent to the impression of which he was conscious. Byron walked down a long colonnade of silence to bow over the hand of the hostess.

Then the name of the next one to arrive was heard in the distance, and before it had swelled into distinctness the rooms were humming once more. Only to Byron had the acclamation of silence been granted by that splendid assemblage, and that spontaneously too. His name had been on all lips up to the moment of his entering. It is impossible to continue talking of a man when he has appeared among those who have made him a topic.

He had his circle in a moment. Men with ribands and stars made up the circumference ; they could not with dignity crush in upon their wives and daughters who were hovering around the centre. The young wives were the most enterprising : when a lion has the reputation of being very wild the animal is doubly attractive. When it is understood that he may take a fancy to devour those who are fondling him, their courage in persisting must be appreciated. A new species had been discovered : a poet who was dangerous. Such a thing had never before been heard of. It had always been assumed that the poet was not to be classed among *Carnivora* ; that he was incapable of being otherwise than frugivorous. Fruit products, subjected to the process of fermentation, had sometimes made a variation in his diet ; but still, fruit. He was tame ; would eat out of the hand. But here was the new specimen. Beautiful as the best of *Carnivora*—most of them were beautiful—and yet dangerous—not to be approached without risk, and therefore to be approached with intense interest. Every woman feels within her the ability to be the tamer of the wild man ; survivors of the experiment have been known.

They crowded round him—a little fluttering, a

trifle of awe, a readiness to show their captivating femininity by flight (a charming paradox), a word or two of almost breathless admiration, a timid inquiry about the beauties of the Bosphorus—inanimate beauties, of course—not a breath about the seraglio, though it was whispered that the wild poet had had his experience there—that was all. And yet every few minutes someone of the household brought up a fresh addition to the circle, and Byron had to respond to a shrinking courtesy and the inane attempts at conversation of the blushing matrons and maidens. It was the age when modesty was accounted a virtue, though how they contrived to associate it with the costume of the Empire is difficult to understand. It was also the age of blushing ; that one can understand with less trouble.

It was when Byron was being bored to extinction by one of the Blues—an isosceles triangle of a woman who wished to write a romance of the Bosphorus, gaining all her knowledge of the region from what he was pleased to tell her—that there was a distinct movement on the outer edge of his circle—such a movement as ruffled it to the very centre as the surface of a round pond of ornamental water is ruffled when some capacious body drops into it from the bank.

It was plain that some foreign body capable of effecting a large displacement of the element that eddied round the poet had been projected from without. The ripples rolled to right and left as if Pharaoh and his host—the horse and his rider—were coming on ; there was the sound of a foreign accent rippling along and refusing to be impeded by any pebbles of pronunciation—ripping—rushing—bubbling—babbling—on it went sweeping everything before it ; and when passage had been made, Byron looked down the vista and saw coming toward him a quivering figure indifferently protected by a flimsy robe against the scrutiny of the crowd—a plump creature, that

somehow suggested the approach of a war-horse that is a mare.

She clapped her hands together when she saw Byron at his end of the river bed, that she had dried up as doth Behemoth—she clapped her hands, and the action made her vibratory and pendulous all over, so that the glass lustres in the candelabra jingled.

“ Ach—yez—yez—’tis ‘e—Allah-illa-Allah ! And Biron is Biron—der ist no oder ! ”

She had flung herself on him and he was swallowed up before Lord Holland had said—

“ My Lord Byron, I have the honour to present to you Madame de Staël.”

“ My Lord, I am overwhelmed,” gasped Byron, and truer words were never spoken. He kept her at a distance only by lowering his head, making a series of bows. She made several attempts to get at him, but his politeness foiled her. His curls had been jerked in a cluster over his forehead, partially obscuring his vision ; but Madame de Staël’s strong personality appealed to more than one sense : he was conscious of her proximity : he could hear the sound of her shrugs.

“ Enfin—enfin ! ” she said, clasping her hands in front of him—they were so plump that the fingers did not interlace beyond the first joint. “ Now, we shall send these people away and we shall have what you call here a quiet shat—a quiet shat.”

She put one of her hands upon his arm and conducted him with a proprietary air to one of the new couches which had just been designed in France—bronze Sphinxes on the arms and Roman trophies on embossed plates screwed on the mahogany. She seated herself near the arm in the attitude of David’s Madame Recamier—her costume differed in only a few details from that of Madame Recamier ; there was so little of either the difference could not be great—and motioned him to place himself beside her. He did so—not without flinching.

“ Now we shall have our quiet shat. You have

interested me more than any man since Jean-Jacques, not because you are a great poet, but because you are a phase—you understand—a phase of the English people. I wish to master this—to get at its depths—to learn how it is that you, who have shown yourself to be everything that the nation hates—young, handsome, wicked, atheist, are still the idol of the nation. Shall I tell you why it is? I will tell you; it is because the English nation is a nation of hypocrites—because while it turns up the white of one eye in horror at the very whisper of an impropriety, it is winking the wink of a satyr with the other eye. That is the truth. You know it, no one better. And now we shall have our quiet shat."

"That will make a pleasant change, madame," said Byron.

CHAPTER III

THEY had what Madame de Staël was pleased to term a quiet chat—that is to say, Madame de Staël talked without a pause, except when she was wiping from her forehead the pearls of dew—gems of a genius that knew not frigidity—for half an hour, and Byron listened. He found it convenient to do so, after he had made an attempt, during the first ten minutes of their chat, to fling a tiny pebble into the torrent of loquacity which began to flow from her. Madame de Staël was always “in spate,” as it were, and a single pebble of speech produced no impression upon her volume. Only Doctor Johnson could have stemmed her torrent, for Doctor Johnson flung not pebbles, but rocks. Possibly one of his granite crags of conversation would have made some impression upon her; but she could overwhelm all her contemporaries. The ideal conversationalist was, she admitted, the deaf mute whom some humourist had set down beside her at dinner.

She asked Byron a question, and as this was his first experience of her, he fancied that she meant him to answer her; but before he had well begun, she had answered her own question, and distributed the material for half a dozen other questions—as a matter of fact, she only touched upon questionable—very questionable—topics, and for every one she had her answer ready, with a brilliant disquisition by way of pendant.

This was quite delightful, Byron felt; he was not an ambitious talker himself, and in simple matters of rhetoric he was not strenuous. He felt that he was

relieved of a great responsibility when he found himself placed beside a conversationalist so complaisant as to answer the questions which she herself propounded. He was all the more pleased, seeing that so many of the questions could only be replied to by a woman conversing with herself. Madame de Staël talked in the style of the essayist who is not afraid. No topic was too sacred to be touched upon by her—nor was any too intimate to be dealt with frankly and brilliantly. She dragged in topics by the ears—little naked imps of topics—from the congenial and convenient obscurity in which civilisation had allowed them to carry on their pranks for centuries, out of sight, if not quite out of mind ; and setting them up comically on a stool, without so much as a rag on their bodies, she lectured them on their wicked ways and then laughed at them, calling on Byron to do the same, while she pointed out to him their horrid little leathery bats' wings, their venomous claws, their evil but very droll mouse's ears. She ended by making him feel that all these diabolic little topics were only *drôle*—that one had only to get accustomed to their little ways to obtain a deal of amusement out of them—not necessarily innocent amusement, though some people fancied that they deprived them of their poison the moment that they termed them “physiological analyses.”

“Ach ! people in England are so modest that they will not talk of these matters except in whispers even to their physicians,” she said—it may be mentioned that she maintained in her pronunciation the best traditions of broken English.

“That is why no conversation is worth listening to in English except one that is conducted in whispers,” remarked Byron, taking advantage of a momentary pause.

She paid no attention to him.

“That is why there has been no writer of comedy in England since the days of Congreve—no true romance since *Tom Jonas*. *Tom Jonas* should have marked

the beginning of an era in the art of romance ; but the opportunity was missed, and now what have you fallen to in England ? Your Sheridan has wit, but it is more than twenty years ago since he wrote his *School for Scandal*, and what has he written in the meantime ? As for your Cumberland and your Colmans—pshut ! ” she shrugged, and the lustres twinkled and tinkled. “ As for your romance writers —Mon Dieu ! they fix a turnip on the end of a pole, wrap a black cloak about the stick, keep it well in the dark, and then whisper to their friends that they have created a man ! So much for the *roman anglais*—‘ The Mystery of ’—what you please—‘ The Mystery of—Heaven only knows what,’ I call it.”

“ And now of the *poët anglais*, madame ? ” said Byron.

“ *Milord Biron*, ” said Madame, pronouncing the name in the French way, “ there were no poets in England until you returned from the East. There was Mr. Rogers—our dear friend—a true good friend—Mr. Rogers. They say that he has the recipe for the best *pot-pourri* outside Constantinople. A poet ? I tell you there is no man who has lent so much money on the security of ‘ dove ’ continuing to rhyme with ‘ love.’ Then there is one Wordsworth—one Southey—one Moore—these are not poets—they are poetesses —there you have the use for that beautiful English word of yours—poetess ! A poetess is someone who writes poetry and is not a poet—someone who writes of passion in a ladylike fashion. England has never lacked ladylike gentlemen to write poetry with mittens on their hands, and with milk for ink—they are so shocked at the blackness of ink that they use milk—yes, mixed with water. But ‘ Childe Harold ’ contains the trumpet blast of the true poet, who is also a true man. To be a true man is to have known what people call wickedness. Wickedness is as much a part of true manhood as bravery and virility. It is written in ink—black ink—yes, and passages of it in blood—

the red blood that palpitates in the veins of a man who has lived his life. And now you must tell me in detail some of the wickedness which that charming 'Childe Harold' enjoyed in his Castle before setting out in despair to enjoy more in the East."

Of course she did not pause for his reply. It never entered into her head that any reply from him was needed. She was off again in an instant on another track—this one the Mediterranean route to Venice, asking him if he did not believe that Venice was the wickedest place in Europe—scarcely doing more than hanging by the slender shackle of a hyphen her second question to her first.

It was quite as well that she was so self-absorbed—that she was so delightfully independent a converser ; if she had had a moment to spare to courtesy she would have seen that Byron was not looking at her—that he had even fallen out of the attitude of the absorbed listener—that he was gazing with some eagerness on his face—some tightening of his hands upon the cushions of his seat, at a figure sitting at some distance from him, partly in the shade of a large screen.

It was a soft girlish figure, he could see, though her back was turned toward him. He had not caught sight of her features, but the moment that there was an ebbing of the stream of people from her neighbourhood, he had seen the bright gleam of her hair playing like a lambent flame here and there about the ivory of her throat—the marble of her shoulders—and curving downward like a tongue of fire about her ears. The moment it flashed upon his eyes, he gave a start. He remembered that marvellous hair, and recognised the wonder of its phosphorescent light gleaming deep beneath the surface.

He saw no more. She was engaged in conversation with a man in a brilliant uniform who was standing in front of her, and she did not move her head sufficiently far to allow Byron a glimpse even of her profile. But he kept his eyes upon her shapely head all the

time that Madame de Staël was answering her own questions and imparting to him (she thought) her views on many vexed questions of religion and morality and the sexes. He would have given worlds to see that head, with the gold beneath the auburn clinging to it, turn in his direction ; but this was after he had been gazing at it for some time. If he had come upon it suddenly face to face, he believed that the surprise of the meeting would have been too much for him to bear, without giving some sign of what he felt. Even now as he looked at her he was astonished at the revelation which was made to him of his own feeling. He was astonished to find that, under the witchery of that lambent light that quivered about her head, the love which he believed had passed out of his life years before, had arisen, not wan with the pallor of a ghost, but warm and breathing. It was still a part of him ; it still had the power to make him flush—to bring a mist before his eyes.

And all the time that he gazed, his heart full of the past—full of the wonder of seeing the past which he thought to be dead, now living so close to him—the voice of Madame de Staël went through all its inflections and deflections beside him, sounding in his ears like the incantation of a witch to call up a ghost.

Was it really true, she pretended to want badly to know, that Childe Harold had had a secret adventure at the Convent at Cadiz—that one of the lovely black-eyed sisters—a novice not yet sure that her calling had power to satisfy a nature nurtured in the sunny South—or was the fair one a Circassian girl whom he had saved from a flaming harem within easy reach of the Bosphorus ? Not that she thought that the régime of the harem was insupportable. There were women . . . she had heard that Turkish women were well treated—almost as well as Arab horses. . . . Woman as a chattel . . . why need to travel to the East for examples ? . . . in a convent

. . . well, there were also women who had no higher aspirations than to awaken punctually at the ringing of a bell to say a prayer for a soul that most likely was past praying for. . . . But there were instances, she knew, of these Brides of the Church. . . . Temperament? — perhaps. Training — who could tell? At any rate, a woman's heart. . . .

It was at this point—Lord Byron had not spoken for a quarter of an hour—that Lady Holland came up—a beneficent interrupter.

“What, is it possible that Lord Byron has been selfish enough to monopolise you all this time, dear Madame de Staël?” she cried, turning eyes of mock reproach upon the eyes of the poet. “Oh, my lord, this tyranny may be Oriental, but it will not be tolerated at home.”

“True—true, I had forgot,” said Madame. “Yes, I had forgot that the Oriental tyranny of devotion to one lady only will not be tolerated in England. It may do very well for the Bosphorus, but Englishmen are far too broad-minded to submit to it. But *Milord Biron* has not yet become accustomed to English freedom.”

“I have been so held in thrall for the past half-hour by the manacles of wisdom and the shackles of wit that I shrink from the thought of freedom,” said Byron, bowing as Madame de Staël rose to greet Lord Melbourne. Lord Melbourne came up with the word supper, and that was a word that affected Madame de Staël pretty much as the matin bell does the devout nun of whom she had been speaking.

“Superb—brilliant—illuminating—speaks like an angel—one never tires—I could have continued listening to him for another hour.”

That was her judgment upon Byron, delivered in no confidential undertone, while she walked away with Lord Melbourne.

Lord Melbourne smiled.

But before Madame de Staël had quite recovered

her balance after responding to Byron's compliment, he had sent his eyes down the room to the object on which they had been resting. It was still there—that small, shapely head wearing the nimbus of a saint.

"Everyone is waiting to be presented to you, Lord Byron," said Lady Holland; "but I think that you should be allowed to have some voice in the selection."

She followed the direction pointed out by his eyes.

"I see that you are absorbed," she said in a whisper, that emerged from the centre of a smile. "Is she not exquisite? You have met her? If not, may I? —"

"I do not think that I shall need to be presented," said he, recovering himself. "If I might venture—"

"Stay with her for an hour—I shall be saved making any further excuses to those who wish me to present them to you. Madame de Staël did admirably, but she—"

Lady Holland made a prettily confidential gesture in the direction in which he was gazing, and then turned to a group on her right.

Byron made up his mind that he would greet Mary now that he had the chance, being left alone for a minute. He was conscious of Lord Lansdowne talking to a lady a short way off, and he could see that he was their topic. They seemed at the point of moving toward him. Waiting only for a few moments, he made the pretence of catching sight of someone at a distance to whom he was anxious to speak, and then quickly left the column against which he had been leaning, and took a few hasty steps that caused him to be lost in a crowd, broken up in small groups.

He was still able to catch a glimpse of the knot of her hair—the gleam of a candle was reflected from it now and again—and he made his way steadily toward

it, only keeping somewhat to the left ; for he meant to pass round the screen at one end of which she was seated, and thus come upon her face to face. But he was nervous lest she should be taken away by someone before he should reach her—pairs were moving toward the supper-room.

He reached the screen, slipped alongside of it, then quickly round the farthest leaf, turned and took a rapid step or two toward her.

He stopped with a shock. He was face to face with her, but she was not Mary Chaworth.

He stood there gazing—overwhelmed with surprise, and displaying his confusion—flushing—turning white—letting his eyes fall to the floor—standing like a schoolboy.

He heard a little laugh—the rippling of Zephyrus among campanella. He glanced up. The lady with the will-o'-the-wisp hair was looking at him—and now he saw that her hair was far lighter in shade than Mary's. On her face the dimples that were, he knew, the dainty footprints of the laugh which had scampered over her cheeks, were still visible. The expression which she wore was one of consciousness of conquest, and it became her very well. It did not seem to be one to which her features had any difficulty in accommodating themselves. She had leant back upon the cushion that lay over the shoulder of her couch, and was smiling sideways at him out of melting, grey eyes—eyes that were only a shade lighter than his own ; and she displayed through smiling complaisant lips, a jewel case of coral, white and crimson, above a tiny chin, overhanging a throat and interspaces which her costume, short-waisted and abundant as to material, emphasised ; for the abundance simply meant that which was transparent mingling with that which was diaphanous.

And in the midst of the frozen billows that foamed about her ankles were a pair of shapely sandalled feet, embroidered in silver, and lying among

the muslin waves as carelessly as salt-frosted sea-weed lies just where the fingers of the incoming tide touch.

And then she half closed her eyes and laughed sideways at him again.

He turned with reddening cheeks and fled.

CHAPTER IV

BYRON did not merely leave the salon, though he had no idea of doing more when he found himself following the casual details of the crowd, who were on the way to the supper-room ; but when he reached the great hall a breath of fresh air came upon his face. In the impulse of the moment, and under the influence of the memories that it brought to him of a night when a sudden gust had swept through a hall which he knew, he went among the lines of lackeys and ordered his carriage. He was at his rooms in St. James's Street in a few minutes.

It was with an unaccountable sense of having saved himself by flight from a threatened danger, that he threw himself upon his sofa. He had so great a sense of relief that he found himself taking a deep breath, and then sighing it away. And yet when he began to think what it was that he had escaped, he found it difficult to define. To be sure, he had for a few minutes found himself looking awkward, and being looked at and laughed at in his awkwardness. But he could have regained his composure after being on the skirts of this contretemps, in one of the supper-rooms of the house. The blaze of lustrous candelabra, and the gaze of an admiring crowd—he took the admiration for granted—would have quickly restored the *amour propre* of even the most sensitive man.

Yet he lay there smiling, as if by the exercise of some adroitness, he had contrived to escape—but only just to escape—a great danger.

It seemed to him that he had had the impression

that if the charming creature who had so startled him twice—first, when he had taken her for someone else, and again, when he had found out his mistake—had continued laughing at him, something would have happened.

But what would have happened that could possibly be thought of as a danger to himself?

He knew that he had recently become more thoughtful than he had ever been to maintain a pose of some dignity; but he had a sufficient sense of comedy to prevent his feeling greatly hurt by a pretty woman's laughing in his face, although he had certainly not been accustomed to the spectacle. If she had continued laughing, he would assuredly have joined her; and then—

And then?

Was it possible that this was the danger of which he had had an animal's instinct—the intimacy suggested by the idea of their voices being joined together in the laugh?

He thought of her attitude on the couch when he had turned at the end of the screen, and had found himself face to face with her. His friend Douglas Kinnaird had once told him a hunting experience that he had had in the Caucasus. He had tracked a bear all the day through one of the passes of the mountains, and expected to be near enough to have a shot at it before sunset. He was crawling on his hands and knees round a narrow ledge of rock that jutted out from the shoulder of the hill, and just as he got round the projecting point, he found himself looking into the eyes of a leopard.

He felt that he had never before quite appreciated Kinnaird's description of his surprise, and the effect that it had on him.

Of course his friend had a lively sense of escaping from an awkward situation; but it was only with regard to the surprise that the recollection of Kinnaird's experience came back to him, not with regard to his escape; but still—

He had only seen her for a few seconds in that exquisite attitude into which she had naturally dropped when she had become interested in his surprise, and his boy's way of showing it. (He was still enough of a boy to blush at the recollection of how he had blushed.) He could not have been looking at her for more than half a dozen seconds ; but that space was quite sufficient to cause him to feel that he had never seen a more fascinating picture. He did not know who the woman was—he knew who she was not—but beyond a doubt she was almost beautiful. Her complexion was transparent, and her figure, revealed down to the arch of her instep by her soft, clinging costume, was gracious in every line. His heart responded to the subtle confidences of her costume ; and then—and then, he had heard her laugh, and turned and fled to the sound of the further fluting of her laughter.

And now when he thought of her he began to wonder how he had ever been stupid enough to fancy that her hair had any resemblance to that which he had seen flowing over the white garment of a girl with bare feet, that made a gentle pattering on the oak floor. It was not the same. The one had the living, golden gloss of a phosphorescent wave ; whereas this that he had just seen, had the pale flicker of the wisp of the morass. It was lovely, but not with the loveliness of the first. He had been very stupid in this matter—he had been stupid all through this incident. He had actually run away because she had laughed at him. That was a pretty thing for a man to do who had been on terms of considerable intimacy with a good many women in a good many climes, especially those whose reputation was not goodly ! He had actually run away ! . . .

He pulled out his watch. It might not yet be too late to retrieve his position—to teach her that, although a man may, in the impulse of a great surprise, blush for a moment, yet he may still. . . .

It was all in vain. He could not bluster himself up to a point of feeling that he had not done well in running away—in procrastinating the moment for which that beautiful creature (whoever she was) waited, alert and alluring. He knew that he had looked foolish in her eyes for more than a minute. He wondered if he had not, after all, laid the foundation of a reputation for wisdom by running away. He wondered if a beautiful woman who set herself out to be alluring, ever forgave a man for running away. Did such a woman ever forgive a man for displaying his wisdom at the expense of her vanity ?

Thus Byron, the poet, idolised by woman, discussed in his own mind the philosophy of a woman's vanity, arriving, as a matter of course, at no definite conclusion on the subject, but being swayed in the impulse of his own vanity, which assumed the *alias* of philosophy, first in one direction and then in another. His vanity was in excellent working order, though never a poet lived who had less : it was so active that it prevented his recognising the truth, which was that he felt he had been guilty of treason to the love which had taught him that he was a poet, in taking the one hair for the other. This mistake caused him to fly from the room, and imparted to him that curious impression, of which he was still conscious, that he had made good his escape from some indefinable danger.

He did not go to bed for some time, and it took him an hour to fall asleep ; and yet among all the thoughts that came to him, there was not one that suggested the possibility of people talking about his sudden and unaccountable disappearance from Lady Holland's reception, where he was supposed to be the central figure. It never occurred to him to think that the expression of consciousness of conquest which was on the face of the beautiful woman on the couch, was becoming to her features, because it was so frequently worn as to have become habitual with her. He had no idea that she would be clever enough to

turn to her own advantage before the world, an incident which she shared with him alone—it really would scarcely bear to be thought of as an incident—it was only a start and a blush, and a sudden disappearance, and yet by her adroitness it became a beginning.

Moore called upon him before he had drunk his morning bottle of soda-water—it was one of his biscuit and soda-water days. The Irishman was so roguishly enigmatical as to be quite unintelligible.

“A victim!” he cried, with a burlesque sigh, and a raising and lowering of his eyes. “Is it a victim that you are, my lord, or a conquering hero?”

“That’s what I should like greatly to know,” said Byron. “The two issues are commonly so confounded it needs the opinion of a poet and a man of the world like yourself, to determine which is which.”

“A willing victim in such a case—only there never was such another case,” said Moore. “Heavens! such rapidity of conquest. But, then, there never was quite such another as Lord Byron. And as for her ladyship—well, to be sure, there was Cleopatra. But within an hour! Heavens! And Lady Holland says that she offered to present you, and that you said you were acquainted with her already. Madame de Staël, when she heard the whispers, had her laugh, and her epigram, and her shrug, the last a living fly in the amber.”

“Do you remember what this marvellous epigram was?” asked Byron. “If you tell me what it was, and to what it referred, I shall be pleased to give you my opinion as to its aptness. Meantime, it is difficult to appreciate either the amber or the fly. What happened at Lady Holland’s after I left?—you may not know that I went away quite early.”

Moore twinkled merrily for a moment, and then burst into a loud laugh, that threatened the stability of his stock.

“You carry the whole thing off with a splendid air,” he cried. “Upon my soul, you do! but, my

dear friend, take my advice, and never try to play a part with your attorney or your confidential poet. Oh, you left early, did you? Sly—sly, my Lord Byron! Well, you confess, and that disarms the suspicious. But what's the need of a confession when I was there to see for myself?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, man, say at once what you came here to say, and do not keep on that 'I could an' I would ' air,'" cried Byron, with some measure of irritation. "What is it that you came here to say? You cannot tell me that anyone knew why I went away so early."

"Therefore, everyone has a right to a guess at the reason, and they had their guess, and they all guessed the same thing," said Moore.

"When they are unanimous, their unanimity is astonishing," said Byron. "And were you made aware of the conclusion they came to?—but you may have been yourself among those who conjectured?"

"There is none like her in the world," said Moore. "If she had been born a man she would be to-day the greatest commander alive. Gracious heavens! the thought of her achievements sweeps one off one's feet! Such sweet audacity! such adorable daring! I give you my word that Rogers himself—well, it was said that Rogers was once foremost in her train."

His voice had sunk to a confidential whisper, and he held up a hand of awe as he made his revelation.

"Is it possible—Rogers—actually Rogers?" said Byron in exactly the same tone. "I would not have believed it."

"That is because you do not know her sufficiently well," said Moore.

"Faith, that is a very plausible reason," said Byron. "I believe that I do not know her sufficiently well, considering that I do not know her at all. Look you here, Thomas the Rhymer; attend to me while I give you my word of honour, that since I addressed my feeble remark to Madame de Staël—a remark that

was like a child's hiccup in the centre of a thunder-storm—I have uttered no word to any woman, good—like a few of them ; bad—like most of them ; or indifferent—like all of them. Come now, out with your story, keeping this affirmation as your basis. Don't force me to tell my man Fletcher to clean up my pistols."

"What," cried Moore, "you mean to tell me that you did not talk with Lady Caroline Lamb ?—that you did not go with her?—my dear Lord, you must surely have heard enough of her to know that in a little affair of this kind—"

"The little affair is less than little ; it is non-existent. I never spoke to Lady Caroline Lamb in my life. Of course, I have heard of her ; but I have not the honour of her acquaintance. I do not know her, even by sight. Was she at Lady Holland's last night ?"

"Lady Holland said that you told her that you were acquainted with Lady Caroline, and that you went to her side the moment you escaped the de Staël."

"Then Lady Holland said what was — Great Bacchus ! I begin to perceive from what quarter the wind blows. Lady Caroline—a fascinating creature, with hair like—like a will-o'-the-wisp, and a figure to correspond ?"

"I thought you must have seen her. So then the story is—"

"More ridiculous than ever. This is the true story : I caught a glimpse of the back of a shapely head while I was pretending to listen to Madame de Staël's diatribes. I was foolish enough to think that the hair resembled that of—of a lady whom I knew some years ago, and when the de Staël had left me free, I mentioned to Lady Holland that I was going to renew my acquaintance with that lady—no name was mentioned—there was no need. Lady Holland said, 'You know her ?' indicating, I suppose, Lady Caroline Lamb. I said 'Yes,' meaning not Lady Caroline, but my friend. When I got face to

face with her, I was startled to find that she was a stranger. I turned and fled—straight to my rooms. That's the whole true story."

The Irishman looked comically solemn for some moments, and then the catspaw of a smile on his face was shaken to a storm of laughter.

"It is not all—the best has yet to come ; you are not acquainted with it," he cried. "You could not have been gone more than a few minutes when Lady Caroline disappeared as mysteriously as you had. You were quickly missed from the salon, and one of the men said that you had called for your carriage and driven away. Immediately afterwards Lady Caroline was not to be found. More inquiries in the hall—result : her ladyship had also called for her carriage and driven away. Now you can understand what was the topic that enlivened the latter part of our evening at St. James's Square."

"No, that I cannot," cried Byron. "What, sir, can a man not take his carriage to his own door without its being assumed by his hostess and his fellow-guests that he is running away with the next lady who leaves the same house ? I tell you, Moore, it is too bad. Lord ! If this is your England, give me Constantinople and my Turks."

Moore smiled, but gravely.

"My dear Lord Byron," he said, "pray don't talk of England as if I owned it. Ireland is my country, and the deadly enemy to England for many years. But let me say that in this special bit of gossip—"

"Bit of gossip ? Miserable slander, if you please ! "

"Lady Caroline would not thank you to defend her respectability at the expense of her adventurousness. No, the truth is that we have been wondering for the past sometime, what the next escapade of Lady Caroline would be. Her husband is said to have been quite uneasy, 'tis unnatural for her to remain so long calm. Her pauses are seldom of such duration."

"That is all very well. But why pay her the bad compliment of assuming that I must be the other cloud to attract this charming, electrical creature, and so precipitate a storm that seems to have been looming for some time?"

"I am afraid that our friends take too literally the personality of 'Childe Harold,'" replied Moore.

"Our friends? Our enemies rather," said Byron, quickly.

"Our best friends are invariably our worst enemies," said Moore. "I am afraid that you will never be forgiven for not running away with Lady Caroline. Certainly her husband will never forgive you for the omission."

"Heavens, you Irishman, I cannot be expected to run away with a woman to whom I have never spoken, merely to oblige her husband," cried Byron.

"If it became known that I was so obliging I should need to have the Bank of England behind me and Carlton House before me to meet all the demands that would be made upon me. Enough of this. You may let it be known as soon as you please, that the history of 'Childe Harold' is not an autobiography."

Moore shook his head.

"It is easy enough making the announcement," said he; "but the public will continue to take it as such."

"Then in Heaven's name let them take it for what it is: the autobiography of a rake who has seen the error of his ways and amended them."

Moore laughed slyly.

"I believe that you have hit on the only way that remained to you to give an additional coat of blacking to your character," said he. "Childe Harold, the profligate who determined to reform, went to Constantinople to carry out his cure, and then came to London to complete it! Lord Byron, I shall drop in to Murray and tell him to print another edition on the strength of this advertisement."

" You may go to the—the publisher, and be hanged to you all ! I wish that I had never come back to this miserable place of petty scandal and kitchen intrigue."

Again Moore was tickled.

" That's all very well in its way," said he. " But to be the author of a popular poem is to become the servant of the public, and you will find that you must run away with Lady Caroline Lamb, because it is expected of you."

" I'll do it by deputy, Moore," said Byron.

Moore, who had not yet quite paid off his liabilities on account of his deputy in the office of Collector at Barbados, shook his fist at his friend, and then waved him an adieu.

CHAPTER V

BYRON'S annoyance at the report which Moore had brought to him was sincere ; but it was not long lived. He reflected that, after all, he had not been accused by the gossips of any act which society looked on as a crime. English society in his day was, quite as much as it is in ours, disposed to take a lenient view of such an incident as that which was laid to his charge—to his credit, rather, Moore would have it. There are some people who prefer the voiceless shrug of toleration, when referring to the reappearance among their usual associates of the participators in these little fantastic steps in the serious minuet of marriage ; but there are others who bite their lips, lower their heads and then look up with eyes that barely refrain from laughter ; again there are some who lean across the table with one protective palm held sideways at their mouth, while they whisper the toothsome details to their friends. But the end of all is laughter and good-humour, and an expression of wonder what the world is coming to.

But to say that society has not its rigidities would be ridiculous. Byron knew it had—" You must not be found out cheating at cards."

" Outside the card-room the Ten Commandments are obsolete; within the card-room people are more religious: they retain one," said Byron, when his rooms were deserted on the departure of a great lady with her sole unwedded daughter, that same afternoon. His moralisings when Moore had gone were interrupted by his accustomed visitors. They had come by the dozen

during the weeks that followed the first blaze of the meteor, "Childe Harold," but this day they came by the score. Two Duchesses (with daughters); three ex-Ministers (with wives); a peeress or two, and then the general circle where fashion and letters met, and occasionally shook hands. His rooms had never been so crowded before; and he noticed that many of his visitors, immediately on entering, glanced furtively into dim corners and peeped behind screens and pedestals, as if expecting to find Lady Caroline concealed somewhere.

But everyone had been very pleasant and gracious, and some even gay as well as witty. The silken swish of scandal went round certain groups, and there was a pretty uplifting of hands—playing at being shocked, parodying the prude. Here there was merriment. In other groups there was in the conversation something like the beating of time; they were talking of some forthcoming poem, and here there was solemnity.

Byron's annoyance on hearing Moore's story had long ago vanished, and when he found himself alone he discovered that it had given place to a certain admiration of the cleverness of the young woman who must have observed his departure, and made up her mind to set the tongues of that distinguished company wagging, almost compelling them to associate her name with his in a transaction which could not fail to be talked about. When he hurried away from Lady Holland's on the previous night, he had not thought about the act being an unusual one, though it occurred to him before he went to sleep that it would bear to be so interpreted. But that young woman must have known perfectly well that it was an unusual act, and that for it to be followed almost immediately by her own disappearance, would cause it to be regarded as an extraordinary one. He had also an impression that she knew that people would not talk of each act separately; they would take very

good care to link the one with the other, and talk about them as if they constituted a single incident.

That meant that the young woman meant that her name should be joined with his precisely as had been done by their friends before many hours had passed.

But what could her object be?

That he found rather more difficult to determine. Had she been impelled by a sort of schoolgirl's love of mischief, to lead on her friends to the discovery of a mare's nest? or did she wish to punish him for his impudent bashfulness when he stood before her? Perhaps she wished to teach him a lesson in self-possession, or was it in good manners, which some people consider the beginning and the end of all knowledge?

He had frequently heard of Lady Caroline Lamb since his return from the East; but he had never before had an opportunity of seeing her. Now and again he had heard her name bandied about a club card-room, in connection with some freak of hers—in connection with some *jeu d'esprit* of hers, as bright as a surgeon's knife, and as sharp-edged. She was undoubtedly the most unconventional creature that ever made a man's life a burden to him, that man being her husband; and she maintained her reputation (for unconventionality) unsullied by a single relapse; so that for three or four years she was a fearful joy to hostesses who were content to overlook the convenances in order to secure a possible source of attraction to a necessary guest or two.

People knew a good many things that she had done, but no one was bold enough to say what she would do next. It was only safe to say that she would not repeat herself. No matter how foolish was the thing she had done, she would not repeat it. She seemed to have within herself inexhaustible resources of shocking, and an originality in foolishness that almost amounted to genius. If she had not been amusing, and the wife of Lord Melbourne's heir, she would soon have ceased to jingle in such salons as Lady

Holland's ; but her wit and her vulgarity made her welcome in a society where both qualities were essential to success, before an economical age had agreed to admit candidates who possessed only one of the two.

Byron was more than languidly interested in this remarkable young woman, who had voluntarily linked her name with his in an affair that could not but be widely discussed from many a standpoint, including that which recognised the existence of her husband, a man of distinction and considerable force of character.

Byron's life had been too full of daring not to make him appreciative of any display of this quality in another. His very birth was accounted in some quarters an act of daring, and he had never been conventional since. After thinking about Lady Caroline for an hour or two, he found himself longing to meet her again. He was thinking about her hair. She was the star upon the surface of the mere that had led him to think for a moment of the star that had once been high in his heaven. He had mistaken the pale reflex on the water for that star, and now he had become quite interested in her pale beauty. He wondered when he would have a chance of meeting her. Would it be necessary for him to be presented to her ? Would she not burst out laughing when some hostess linked their names in going through the formality ?

He went to two receptions full of eager anticipation ; and was almost petulant when he found that she had been asked to neither of them. What could hostesses mean by inviting him without her ? That was the question which he put to himself each night driving to his rooms. When the scandal of society had associated their names, who were the hostesses that they should put them asunder ?

After an interval of a day or two he heard her name sent flying down the line of lackeys at a ball given by Lady Westmoreland. She had just entered in advance of him. The fellows nearest the ballroom door were

calling her name, when those nearest the entrance were speaking his ; so that once again their names mingled, and loungers about the doors of the room smiled and gave each other—those of them who were on terms that allowed of an exchange of confidences—playful, but expressive finger-thrusts, or significant jerks of the thumb in the direction of the shoulder.

He fancied that he noticed some of these signs as he passed down the lines of gazing young women—and old women also ; his entrance had made them breathless ; they flocked round him when he had passed and was greeting his hostess. He glanced about him when he had reached one of the little settees that stood between the high console tables with the enormous branches of candles surrounded by quivering crystal prisms, springing out from the centre of the mirrors—he looked about him, but failed to see her.

He was greatly disappointed, but only at first ; it did not take him long to reflect upon the fact that this capricious creature could not be expected to do anything in an ordinary way—that she could not even be passively ordinary ; she was bound to be elusive and unusual. She knew that he would look round expecting to see her, therefore she would take good care to be beyond the range of his eyes. He had no doubt that she was preparing to startle him, and incidentally, the remainder of the people in the ball-room. It was necessary for him to be prepared for any caprice that might seize her.

It was Lady Westmoreland herself who asked him for permission to present Lady Caroline Lamb to him. He fancied that he detected a little twitch of the mobile lips of his hostess, as she said—

“ I somehow acquired the notion that you were already acquainted with Lady Caroline ; but she tells me that you and she have never met.”

“ She speaks the truth : I have never been fortunate enough to meet her ladyship,” said Byron.

"How strange! Someone must be to blame for so grave an omission," said Lady Westmoreland. "What has society done to justify its existence if Lady Caroline Lamb and Lord Byron remain unacquainted?"

"Your ladyship will, with your usual tact, repair the carelessness of months," said Byron. "Shall I accompany you in search of the fascination whom you named?"

"I could not think of allowing you; I shall bring her to your lordship," cried Lady Westmoreland, and no one present seemed to think that the position of Royalty should not be accorded to him in such a matter as the presentation of a young woman occupying the highest position in the social world.

She tripped up, Lady Westmoreland leading her by a dainty finger. She carried her train—it was like the foam of a breaking wave—over her left arm; her jewelled feet were twinkling. She was looking timidly down while she advanced, and everyone saw that she was playing the part of a bashful girl extremely well. One of the wits said that it was a well-known fact that an actor was best in a part which was quite contrary to his nature. Lady Westmoreland seemed to be bidding her to take courage.

When within a couple of yards of where Byron was standing, she stood, her eyes still on the floor, and their long lashes on her cheeks, her left hand pressed against her left side. She had become a statue of the Demure. He took a step forward, and Lady Westmoreland said the usual phrase of introduction. He bowed low, whispering—

"This is, indeed, an honour;" but Lady Caroline did not stir! She remained marble—a statue of Femininity. There was a long pause—an embarrassing pause. It seemed as if she were ready to faint—her body was surely beginning to totter; but just as an arm was about to be put about her, she raised her eyes with the suddenness of a flash—with the sudden-

ness of a blow. She looked at Byron steadily in the face for a few seconds, then quick as lightning, she dropped the foam wreath from her arm, whirled herself half a dozen yards away from him, as though he had made an attempt to lay a hand on her, and she were eluding him. Then she stopped, looked over her shoulder, and laughed at him just as she had laughed on Lady Holland's couch. Still laughing in the most musically mischievous way imaginable, she floated off sideways, slowly for some moments, and then turning round and flying with her diaphanous draperies straining behind her—a veritable Diana, surprised by a man. Only in this case it was the man who was surprised, too surprised to laugh, but certainly not to blush. In a few moments, however, he was joining in the laughter that rippled around him. Everyone was laughing, and nearly everyone was admitting that the tableau had been charming while it lasted. Byron said that he had seen an Albanian dance that was very like all this—a girl facing a man, with downcast eyes, and then suddenly turning and flying, and stopping and looking over her shoulder.

“Only in the dance the girl returned,” said he.

“Lady Caroline should have learnt her part better,” said Lady Westmoreland.

“Your ladyship should not be too exacting: the evening is not over,” remarked someone—a man.

“True,” said her ladyship. “But it would be like Lady Caroline to give a new interpretation of an old dance.”

“A dance that is as old as the little hills that once skipped—as old even as the big ones that were too gouty to skip,” said a philosopher.

The sets were being arranged for a quadrille—“a skip from Albania to Mayfair,” said Byron. “I dare-say that Lady Caroline will be content with the less exciting diversion until she finds herself in the midst of the brigands of Asia Minor.”

“There are several Tory Ministers of Albion Major

present: would she be able to see the difference, do you fancy?" said Mr. Sheridan, who, by the side of Lord Melbourne, had watched the whole incident.

Then came the sound of the fiddlers, and the atmosphere became dense with flying draperies. Byron moved to a chair, not being a dancer. He was joined by a number of his friends, and a brisk conversational kottabos was set in motion, with an anecdote introduced now and again to make it more lively, and an occasional phrase or two whispered across the back of a protecting hand, and followed by a laugh—sometimes by a knowing shake of the head, with an expressive glance.

But all the time that Byron was listening to and participating in these exchanges with his friends, he was glancing with affected carelessness to right and left, expecting the return of Lady Caroline, and wondering in what guise she would reappear—whether in the character of Diana of the Ephesians or of her of Poitiers. He expected her return; but the very fact of his doing so should have been enough to tell him that she would not return. Any other woman would return, therefore Caroline Lamb would not.

He waited in vain. Perhaps she was dancing in the quadrille. He talked more rapidly, and in trying to conceal his uneasiness, revealed it. The dance came to an end; there was a promenade. A score of couples hovered about his seat. He became impatient. Lady Westmoreland slipped up behind him. She had her finger on her lip, not as a signal for silence, but as a suggestion of a coming confidence.

"No one but Caroline Lamb would have had the courage," she whispered. "She is not a woman, she is a meteor—a feminine comet rushing to the sun!"

"Fortunate sun!" murmured Byron. "Is she in perihelion just now, do you fancy?"

"Just the contrary. She has run away," said her ladyship. "Could anyone guess that her intention

was to hurry away? But she is an enigma! You saw her flying after she had behaved so rudely."

"Rudeness may describe the act of someone who is not Lady Caroline Lamb," said he. "A creature so fawn-like should be judged by the laws of the woodland."

"Yes, and then hunted for her life," said the affronted hostess. "The idea of her leaving us in the lurch like this! But, indeed, for myself I always have a feeling of relief when I have seen the last of her for one evening. One never knows what she will do next. I would as soon entertain a young panther. It was Mr. Burke who called her Pocahontas."

"The name was worthy of Mr. Burke's imagination: she is a child of the backwoods—'la belle Sauvage,'"

"No doubt; but when she heard of the sobriquet, nothing would do her but she must appear at Lady Oxford's rout with her face browned, and her hair turned into a pin-cushion for feathers, and a kirtle of wampum so short as to show her leggings of deer skin and a pair of moccasins. She was not easily got rid of. And she has two children—poor little souls!"

"I will buy them a pair of bowie knives and tomahawks to-morrow," said Byron. "We shall teach them how to scalp a pale-face Tory."

Lady Westmoreland laughed.

"It is very polite of your lordship to take her conduct in regard to yourself in such good grace," she said. "You really never met her before?" she added, with a quick turn of her head toward him.

"I never met her before, indeed," he replied. "By the way, I should like to have your ladyship's opinion as to whether I may consider that I have met her to-night. The question appears to me to be a nice one. Perhaps it may not seem so difficult to your ladyship."

"I think that its solution is wholly dependent upon the caprice of the lady," said she. "She interprets her own parables."

"And I believe that the Calvinists believe that the salvation of the world hangs on the correct interpretation of a parable," said he. "Your ladyship's dictum places me in the unfortunate position of a Giaour."

"And pray what is a Giaour, my lord?"

"A Giaour is the Turkish word for an unbeliever, and his fate it is to be lacerated by the scythe of Monkir, and then to wander for ever around the sacred Seat of Eblis. He belongs neither to the Paradiso nor the Inferno."

"And that is exactly the position in which you would find yourself were you intimate with Lady Caroline. You would never know where you stand with such a creature of impulse."

"I shall become a Methodist without delay. They can tell the exact moment when they find grace."

"I shall be in the supper-room after the next dance," said Lady Westmoreland, moving away as the fiddles began to speak.

There was a general movement in the ballroom when the strains of a waltz came from the minstrels' gallery. The whole room was in motion, for those of the company who had no mind to dance thought it prudent to hasten toward the doors. A quarter of an hour later Lord Holland was making inquiries respecting Lord Byron, in order to present to him the distinguished Greek, Movrocordato; but no one seemed to know exactly where Lord Byron was to be found. He was not in the ballroom, nor was he in any of the supper-rooms. Some time had passed before Lord Westmoreland came up with the news that Lord Byron had driven away while the waltz was being danced.

When he did not reappear there was a good deal of laughter, and some whispering among groups of those

who had had the privilege of being present at Lady Holland's reception some nights before.

But when Lady Westmoreland was made aware of the news, she gave a single laugh only, crying—

“A pair of them !”

CHAPTER VI

IT was the fooling of a boy and a girl. Byron felt it when he reached his rooms that night. He had only the satisfaction of knowing that he had played his part in the jest as well as she had played hers—that if she had been silly, he had given a point to her silliness which it had previously lacked. Without laying their heads together they had contrived to play a jest upon their friends, which would cause them to be talked about in the same breath for some time to come. He knew that Lady Caroline would not mind this—he had not become so greatly interested in her as to be unmindful of the direction which had been taken by his first thought of her after Moore had told him that she had left Lady Holland's reception hard on his heels : she had aimed at getting her name associated with his.

Well, she had succeeded, and he had, he knew, just contributed materially to her success. He knew that the moment he was missed from the ballroom a whisper would rustle round the company—it would cease to be a whisper later on : in the supper-room it would be shrilled across the tables by the ladies to their confidants at a distance, and the men would guffaw it from room to room. He heard Lady Westmoreland say, “A pair of them !” as clearly as if he had been at her ladyship's elbow.

It was the fooling of a boy and girl ; and he felt that it was delightfully innocent, in that it pointed to guilt.

He did not care, and it was certain that she did not

care either, what people might say about them. All his life he had led the world to believe that he was worse than he actually was. His poem of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" had this tendency, and he had not shirked the responsibility which devolves on a man who has a reputation for wickedness. He was, however, different from most men. He had, as it were, surrounded himself with a halo of wickedness, and the crowd were ready to worship him on account of the mystery of the atmosphere which he carried about with him. The element of mystery must be associated with every form of worship, and the mystery of wickedness (of a sort) is, in the estimation of the crowd, much more interesting than the mystery of good.

He wondered what she would think when she was told that he had, at Lady Westmoreland's, followed the example which she had shown him at Lady Holland's. He rather thought that she would be amused—that she would recognise in him someone who was worthy to be her partner in—in what?

In folly. Fooling can never be otherwise than folly. He did not make any attempt to disguise this fact in considering the matter before he slept. But it was part of his nature to appear the devotee to folly in his life while writing poems that seemed to come from an atmosphere of mysterious gloom. He liked the story of the philosopher, who, when visited by an earnest disciple, was found vaulting over chairs with children as his companions. He liked the story of the great Marlborough's sitting in his tent making out a list of the washing, while the army was preparing to fight a memorable battle. He asked for nothing better than to have his name associated with the name of Caroline Lamb. If she was a will-o'-the-wisp—and he had already begun to call her so in his own mind—he was a Robin Goodfellow. He longed to meet her again. He wondered what new game she would devise for the fooling of her friends. Whatever it

would be he felt that she might depend on his joining hands with her in carrying it out.

It was certainly amusing that, all the time that people were coupling their names—and people did so with great pertinacity for some days—neither of the pair had exchanged a single phrase.

He paid a visit to Melbourne House, in Whitehall, in the course of the week following the Westmorelands' ball, and found Rogers there, and half a dozen people well known to him.

"We have been talking about you, Lord Byron," said Lady Melbourne. "Will you clear up this mystery for us? Are you quite unacquainted with Lady Caroline Lamb, or are you her most intimate friend?"

"Is there no intermediate position?" said Byron.

"None, so far as I can gather," replied Lady Melbourne. "I have heard it affirmed within the past week, that you had never met her until Lady Westmoreland presented her to you, and I have also been informed that you have for some time been her most intimate counsellor."

"Has her ladyship been acting with even more than her customary discretion, that people are compelled to assume that I have been her counsellor?" said Byron.

Lady Melbourne shook her head.

"Alas! she has never been otherwise than indiscreet," she said.

"And, therefore, you assume that I may have been her counsellor?"

"Seriously, have you and she been carrying out some carnival prank together?—I heard a whisper of something to that effect."

"Seriously, dear Lady Melbourne, I have never exchanged a sentence with the lady in question. But is she not your daughter-in-law? Why not ask her directly all that you wish to learn?"

Lady Melbourne laughed, but with a note of sorrow in her voice, which Byron did not fail to detect.

"I am the last person in whom she would confide or to whom she would confess," she said. "Besides, I am more than a little afraid of her—that is the truth," she added in a whisper.

"I believe that I am the only one in town who is not afraid of her," said Byron. "I feel the isolation of my position in this respect. Perhaps, if I should ever be fortunate enough to become acquainted with her—"

"You may have the opportunity at any moment," said Rogers. "Lady Caroline has just ridden up; she is in the act of dismounting."

"What?" cried Byron. "Did I boast just now that I was not afraid of her? Now Heaven send that we be all alive this time to-morrow!"

The drawing-room door was flung violently open, and Lady Caroline stood on the threshold, a picture of charming dishevelment. Her hair had fallen loose, and its little rings curled and twisted and writhed like a design worked in gold embroidery upon the blue velvet collar of her riding habit. Her face was rosy, and she held up her skirt sufficiently high to show her tiny riding boots covered with mud. She had a whip in her gauntleted hand.

She had begun to speak the moment that the footman threw open the door, but when she caught sight of Byron she gasped down the word that she was in the act of uttering, and stood there silent—frozen—frightened, as it seemed.

The men in the room bowed to the ground. She paid no attention to them. She continued looking at Byron.

"Enter, my dear Caroline, we will excuse your *toilette de chasse*," said Lady Melbourne.

"I am afraid," said Lady Caroline.

"Afraid? afraid of what?" cried Lady Melbourne.

"Afraid of spoiling your beautiful carpet," lisped the other. "Give me time to change my boots and stockings. I will put on a pair of silk ones, if you will wait for me. You will wait, Lord Byron?"

"The allurement which you hold out is not to be resisted, madam," said Byron.

"You promise not to run away this time?" she said gravely.

Byron had no answer ready; and she knew it; before he had time to find one she had banged the door and disappeared.

"Did he ever run away? I had no idea that he had so much discretion," growled old Colonel Duncome.

"I am afraid that I must take my leave. I have an engagement at three," said Moore.

"But that is not for an hour and a half," said Rogers. "You must wait until Lady Caroline has made her change of toilette."

"Then I shall certainly break my engagement," said Moore.

Before ten minutes had passed, Lady Caroline had reappeared. She was wearing a white muslin frock with a flowing sash. The high waist of the costume forced the riband almost up to the hollow of her arms. She led a child by each of her hands—a boy of five and a girl of three. One would have guessed her own age to be eighteen. She was nine years older. So great was the change made by her act of changing, it was difficult to believe that she was the same person who had appeared ten minutes before in all the disorder of her gallop in the park.

She played to perfection the part of the young matron devoted to her children, encouraging their prattle and participating in it in a more childish voice than that which came from either of them. She stopped half-way across the great drawing-room to fasten the little boy's shoe, kneeling on the carpet to

do so, and then taking advantage of the proximity of her head to his to put her arms about him and hug him. It was a pretty picture of innocence that Lady Melbourne's guests were allowed. They were touched. In an instant the recollection of the many silly and absurd things that she had done during the previous year or two was swept away—nay, some of them allowed the act to be prospective as well as retrospective in its force : it swept out of their minds the foolish things which she was still to do.

"These are my protectors," said Lady Caroline, laying a hand on each golden head, and then looking up ecstatically. "Unless I were flanked on every side by innocence how should I be able to face all the wickedness which — which visits my mamma ? "

She looked round the semi-circle with Rogers at one end and Byron at the other, and then turned her eyes innocently upon Lady Melbourne.

"Wickedness resorts to Melbourne House just as gout goes to Harrogate," said Moore.

"And usually with better results," said Rogers mildly.

"Virtue and innocence are to some palates as nauseous as a Sulphur Spa," said Lady Caroline. She was looking gravely at Byron.

"Did your ladyship address me ? " he inquired.

"Certainly not ; I am well aware that your lordship has had no time to analyse the beneficent elements which I named," she replied.

"True, madam," he said. "But that is because I have had so few chances of coming in contact with them in my walk through life."

"I hope you will be a frequent visitor at Melbourne House, my lord," said she.

"That is very kind of you," said he. "Do you suggest that I bring with me test glasses and an apothecary's balance ? "

"I wish to have a serious talk with you, Lord Byron," said she, taking a step toward a seat in the window.

"With your protectors?" he asked, glancing round. She had relinquished her children to Lady Melbourne and Moore. Her last three remarks had been addressed to Byron only.

"Mr. Moore is going to sing for them," she said. "We can talk seriously while he is singing. I hope that he will not compel my tears."

"What would it matter? Everyone would fancy that you were weeping with the seriousness of our conversation. By the way, this is our first conversation, is it not?"

"I seem to have known you for a long time," said she. "My soul—do you believe in the communion of souls, Lord Byron?"

"My creed is made up of one clause only, and that is it," he replied.

"And yet you ran away from me at Lady Holland's," said she with a pout of reproach.

"I saw from the beach when the morning was shining
A bark o'er the waters move gloriously on,"

came the exquisite voice of Moore from the piano, at which Lady Melbourne was sitting. The two children were standing at a little distance, looking with large eyes of wonder at the sentimental expression at which the little Irishman aimed when singing his melodies, but which he never quite achieved, owing to the unhappy tilt of his nose.

"Did I not do well to run away?" asked Byron, playing at seriousness as seriously as she. "You must remember that you laughed. I have often wondered why you laughed."

She became more serious than ever—sadly serious this time, while she said—

"I have wondered too. It would have been much better for me if I had wept."

"Do women weep because men are fools?" he said in a voice so low that the pathos of Mr. Moore's song was not interfered with. "No, I rather think that women—and the devil—laugh together."

"Had you been a fool before you came upon me at the side of that screen?"

"I think that I was a fool until I saw you."

"And after?"

"God knows what after."

"Ah, God and—the one who laughs with men at women."

"But we were talking of a woman laughing. That drove me away."

"What did that mean—foolishness or wisdom?"

"It meant discretion. Do you include that under the head of wisdom or of foolishness?"

"The woman who confesses to a man is not discreet. But I will confess to you, throwing discretion to the winds."

"As usual."

"You have been listening to tales. But if you were wise enough to run away the first time, I was wise enough to do so the second time."

"And yet here we are together now."

"That is an interruption. I am confessing. Do you know why I ran away? I wished to make an entry in my diary. I hastened home for this purpose, and I wrote about you, 'Byron is mad, bad, and dangerous to know.'"

"It is you who have been listening to tales. But I acknowledge the accuracy of the words. I know that I have been mad for—what was the day of Lady Holland's reception? 'Bad?' Well, I am a man. 'Dangerous?'—again, I am a man. Shall I go away? There can be no danger if I go away at once."

"It is too late. I have read 'Childe Harold.' I believe that I was the first woman in the world to read it. Mr. Rogers lent me his copy long before the poem

was published. Do not blame him. I insisted on getting it. I was the first woman in the world to read it. Think of that. Whatever may happen—whatever the future may have in store for me, no power in existence can alter that: I was the first woman in the world to read 'Childe Harold.' "

"If I had known that you lived in the world I would never have written it."

She put her hands before her eyes, and shuddered. She did not speak. She was wise enough to refrain from the attempt to interpret her shudder.

"But I did not know it, and I show my ignorance of your existence in every line," resumed the poet.

Her hands fell from her fan, she turned her eyes upon him, brilliant with feeling at first, and then gradually lapsing into languor—half-closed—smouldering—alluring—the eyes that a single whisper will close.

"You will write another poem to tell me in every line that you know me—my heart—my soul?" she said in a voice of twilight—sudden and soft—a dreamy pause between each of its latter words.

"I cannot say what I shall write," said he, becoming curiously reserved, both in voice and manner, as was his wont at times. "My writing is not in my own hands. Should I not best show that I have been by your side, by refraining from ever writing again?"

"No, no, do not say that. If I thought it possible that I should have such an influence upon you I would curse the hour that I came across your path," she cried, grasping his hand that lay upon the embroidery of the cushion upon which he was leaning. "No, no; I should never forgive myself—never—never! I wish you to come to me to learn all about woman—of what she is capable when she loves—of what sacrifices—of what devotion. You will come to me?"

"I have come to you," he said in a lower tone than all the low tones in which he had yet spoken.

She raised her eyes to his without moving her head,

and after allowing him to look into her depths of blueness, turned them quickly down to her demurely folded hands upon her lap. Her dark lashes fell half-way down her cheeks.

Mr. Moore was singing a patriotic song to the children—they were becoming a little tired of his singing. The boy was lying on his back on the hearth-rug, kicking up his legs; the girl was tasting the succulent qualities of Mr. Rogers' watch. Mr. Moore, in the attitude of the patriot—one hand thrust into the bosom of his coat, the other clenched by his side—was singing with passion—

“Where's the slave so lowly
Condemned to chains unholy,
Who, could he burst his bonds at first,
Would pine beneath them slowly?”

CHAPTER VII

HE had begun by fooling, and before he ended he had gained wisdom. The only way by which a man can acquire wisdom is by making a fool of himself.

That is what everyone said he was doing ; only they put it in another way ; they said that he was being made a fool of by Lady Caroline Lamb. Whether wisdom comes more rapidly to a man who is made a fool of than to a man who makes a fool of himself, cannot be decided, except by the consideration of many cases where the contributory forces of folly—making for wisdom in the end—are duly authenticated.

It was his nature to be attracted to the unusual. He detested everything that was normal—everything that was safe. He was against the Government—from the Government of the Universe down to the Government of the University. That was why they were glad to see the last of him and his bears and bull-dogs at Cambridge. He railed against all authority, including that which made him an author.

He had no illusions in regard to Lady Caroline Lamb. Whatever she was, no one could deny that she was unusual. It was because she was reported never to have done anything like other people—she had even refused to be married like other women—that Byron was attracted to her. Most women, no matter how greatly they may long to become the exponents of the Uncommon, make it a point to be scrupulously commonplace in the matter of marriage,

but this beautiful rebel was so consistent in her aspirations, as to make the ceremony of her marriage the most unceremonious ever recorded, although a bishop stood at the altar rails.

She was worth all the insipid young women in town, Byron perceived the moment that he heard how she had left Lady Holland's reception when she knew that he had gone away ; and he had been quite content to set his friends and hers chattering when he had followed her example at the Westmorelands' a few days later. There was nothing insipid about her—even her lisp and her lapse into sentiment at Melbourne House had impressed him as being a fine sort of satire upon current insipidity. She interested him greatly, and he found himself thinking of her all the day. He had met nothing like her in his life, and he was glad that he had promised to breakfast with her the next morning. She was a wife and a mother. So she was safeguarded. So he was safeguarded.

That was how he thought—yes, at times. But the very fact of his thinking of safeguards, suggested the risk which made safeguards, if not necessary, at least—well, safeguards. That was what made his intimacy with her adventurous, and to him whatever was adventurous was fascinating.

He went to breakfast with her. Her children were present, and again she called them her protectors. That told him that she also had been thinking of safeguards, and incidentally of risks. But he found himself in a more delightful situation than any he had ever occupied. It was so charmingly domestic. He took the greatest delight in the children, and they responded, and were never tiresome because he was untiring in amusing them. And soon he found himself talking to her just as he talked to them. When he began it, by accident, she laughed.

“ Why should you change your language ? I feel that these dear things are really older than I am,” she

cried. "They ask you questions which I am not wise enough to ask."

"You are wise enough to refrain from asking them," said he. "Real wisdom is to be found in not seeking to learn too much."

"Then I am a fool, for I want to know everything," she said.

"That was the mistake that Mother Eve made, and we are all suffering for it to-day," said he.

"I suppose so," she said. "No one will persuade me that marriage was instituted until the expulsion from Eden."

"That is not orthodoxy," said he, "and I will not be a party to anything that is not orthodox, in the presence of the children."

"Then I shall send them away while I tell you why I believe that marriage was a part of the curse," she said pathetically.

"They shall remain if only to prove to me that it was part of the general blessing, and not of the general curse," said he. "I will not have the vagaries of a will-o'-the-wisp inculcated upon them."

"I like to hear you call me Will-o'-the-Wisp," she said. "What name shall I call you, Byron?—you see, I have called you Byron; I hate to think of you as 'my lord.' I think of you as my brother—no, my sister, rather—my elder sister who knows so many things that I do not know, and who sympathises with my ignorance, but refuses to enlighten it. What shall I call you, Byron?"

"Call me your child," he said. "You cannot give me a name that I honour more highly."

"I will call you my Childe—my Childe Harold," she said. "You know I have somehow come to think of 'Childe Harold' as my own."

"He is," said Byron, with his hand on the golden head of the little boy who was sitting on his stool looking with all a child's deep seriousness to each of

his elders in turn as they spoke, trying to make sense out of what they said, and being puzzled.

"*It*, we are talking of *it*, not *he*," she said. "Funny, is it not, that the poem has a soul and is immortal, though the author is not—according to the author."

"I would not advise you to believe in that author," said Lyron.

She jumped up in a passion—the children had seen her in that way before ; they did not mind.

"In whom then am I to believe ?" she cried. "Tell me that, you who have given to me a poem that has changed all my life." She threw herself on her knees beside him—he had been sitting on a low stool on a level with the children. "Byron," she said, tenderly, "you do not know what your poem is to me ; and I thought that I was approaching you through it. Do not bid me now go in search of another Byron. I cannot do it—I swear to you that I cannot do it. I have found you. I must believe in you. You cannot be so inhuman as to cast me out from your presence, believing in no one—believing in nothing."

He could not doubt that she spoke under the impulse of a very strong feeling. She was undoubtedly an emotional creature—a poet of a kind—passionate, undisciplined. He was touched by her appeal to him, and for the first time he had a sense of some responsibility. He had written a poem the tendency of which was to inculcate doubt. He had displaced that faith which meant tranquillity of mind, and he was responsible for the disorder which had followed.

Byron was touched by the passionate appeal which she made to him, and he was conscious of a moment's remorse. He felt that he had done her an injustice in speaking lightly. He had had no notion that she could be so serious.

"I am not a fitting guide for such as you," he said. "I never set myself out to be a guide."

"But you are mine," she cried. "You have made

yourself my guide whether to happiness or to misery—I do not care which. My soul is in your keeping. I am the daughter of your genius. It is too late now for you to think of disowning me."

"It is the last thing I should think of," said he. "But the truth is that I feel that I have no right—who am I that I should venture to talk of owning or disowning?"

"A great poet is one who greatly ventures," she said. "I tell you, my dear Childe Harold, that I have drawn very near to you in reading your poem, and now I feel that my life is in your keeping—the influence of your presence near me is the most potent that I ever knew; and I feel that you too can gain something that may be of value to you some time, by being near me. Byron, it was written in the book of fate that we were to come together. What you think, that I think. I am a woman, and you are a man, and there never was a man in the world who would not at some time have given all the world to have a woman near him. Swear to me that when you need me you will not refrain from bidding me come to your side. I will come, Byron; you know that I will come—you know that nothing will hold me back—nothing that other women hold dear—husband, children, my good name. You will be my friend. I ask you now if you will be my friend?"

"You may trust me," he said. "I think that I am beginning to understand what 'tis to be a woman."

He put out his hand to her. She took it and pressed it to her side. He saw that tears were in her eyes.

In another instant she had sprung to her feet.

"Will-o'-the-Wisp—Will-o'-the-Wisp—that is what you called me, and that is what 'tis to be a woman," she cried, dancing down the room waving the ends of the long sash that she wore; it was of golden yellow riband, and the ends of it fluttered around her like flame. "I am Will-o'-the-Wisp—follow me, follow me, follow me!"

This was something that the children could understand—this whirling dance with flying ribands and waving hands ; there was something intelligible in all this ; very different from that strange, low-voiced conversation with an occasional clasping of the hands, and then that tearful tirade of reproach, which had puzzled them. They were on their feet in a moment flying down the room after her, shrilling her cry, “Will-o’-the-Wisp,” and trying to catch an end of the prim-rose-flamed sash that she held almost as high as her shoulders, shivering like the pennon of a white-sailed sloop in the wind made by her flight.

Byron watched this charming child’s play from where he sat on the floor ; and then, after some graceful flitting between chairs and round tables, she fluttered up to him, waving the riband in his face, and then, allowing it to encircle his neck, tripping round him and leaning very close to him for the purpose, she contrived to include him in the game, much to the delight of the children. Of course, it was inevitable that he should have his hands on her waist—that his arm should be about her in his attempts to disentangle himself—that was a natural part of the game, and no more to be avoided than the clasping of a partner at a spiritual moment in the minuet.

But it set the man’s blood in motion and reddened his pale face.

It was capital exercise, though it did not make him laugh quite so heartily as it did the children. They thought for a moment that he was displeased, and they paused.

“Mamma, mamma, Byr’n’s huffed—look at his face—he’s ready to kvy,” said the little boy. “Don’t kvy, Byr’n, ’tis all play, mamma won’t hurt ’oo. Oh, mamma, give him a kiss before he gets closs.”

She fell down on her knees laughing—breathless from her rushing about.

"It is part of the play," said Byron, putting his arm about her, and kissing her twice—three times.

She made no attempt to resist—she only laughed in the delightfully innocent way of a child at play. That was how she contrived that the kiss should be brought into the game, as if it were no more than the formal clasp in the "surrender" figure of the minuet.

Byron laughed too—after a breathless moment, and the children clapped their hands. The boy was exuberant with the delight of seeing the realisation of his prediction.

"He is dood now, quite dood—oh, such a dood boy ; he is no more closs—no more huffed," he cried.

They wanted their mother to resume the game of will-o'-the-wisp, after the interlude ; but she shook her head.

"That is the end of the game, my darlings," she said.

"Ev'ry game ends mid a kiss, I s'pose," said the boy, pouting, when she refused to yield to his entreaties.

"Yes," she said ; "that is the end of every comedy in life."

"And everything after that is tragedy," said Byron.

It had all been quite delightful, Byron reflected when he found himself alone that night—he had been dining with the Jerseys, but it was not of that entertainment, but of the one which had taken place earlier in the day, that he was thinking. It had all been quite delightful—so delightful that he made up his mind that he would not pay another visit to Melbourne House for a long time—perhaps for ever. She seemed to him the most fascinating—the most tempting creature whom he had ever met.

But what was she ? How was such a thing to be defined ? He came to the conclusion that she was not susceptible of definition. She was an April day. Who could define an April day ? Flashes of sunshine

sweeping across meadows of wildflowers, followed by a whirling shower, but the shower only serves to brighten the pink and blue and saffron enamels that are set in the emerald of the field ; and then a sudden gloom, making mute the melodies of the hedgerow ; but out of the gloom comes a flash of lightning—dazzling ; and then the suggestion of a rainbow—the arch of one of the bridges that span the tumultuous torrent that is called Eternity. Who could define the limits of the revelation of God to the sons of men in an April day ?

Or a Sonata—the first movement dainty, capricious, with here and there a passage of infinite tenderness and feeling ; a second movement having for its theme a mingling of passions—suggestions of vague, unexplored depths of thought—longings—dreamings—a whisper of hope. A third movement of butterfly joyousness—the dance of fireflies—the flying feet of fairies on a night that is flooded with starlight, and every star singing its song into the listening ear of night.

Oh, this poet had no trouble in finding images of her at that hour. His imagination ran riot when he thought of this woman who was so strange a mingling of stimulating elements. He thought of her as being everything save only a woman. It was only when he had imagined her as being everything else that it suddenly occurred to him that she was a woman ; and it was when he thought of her as being a woman that he made up his mind to keep away from her.

He would never see her again. He felt that it would be madness to see her again. Of course it would give him a pang—it would be an agony to sever from his life this sweet, flowering thing, that had wound its tender tendrils about his life, but—the image that was in his mind was of a white, clinging convolvulus about a pillar—the severance must take place before the tendrils found that they were grasping marble and the flowers began to wither. Even though he

should have to go back to his wanderings to effect his purpose, he would save her from being blighted by association with him.

He was very resolute on this point, and he went to bed feeling stronger for his resolution.

He went to her the next day.

"I knew that you would come," she cried. She was alone, and the poet thought how aptly he had thought of her as a *convolvulus*. She wore another frock of white muslin, soft and clinging, with a delicate perfume of early summer hovering about her—sometimes close to her, sometimes at a distance. "I knew that you would come, my Childe Harold, and now I see you—at last—at last!"

"How did you know? I did not know that I should come. I made up my mind not to come," said he.

"What! But you promised. I had not a moment's doubt. I told you how it was with me. You could not have been so cruel as to stay away."

"Cruel, only to be kind. Alas! I am not strong enough to stay away."

"You are not weak enough, you mean. It would have shown an unworthy weakness if you had not come. How would I have taken it? I tell you that I would have taken it as a grave affront, and I should have been right too, for would you not have suggested thereby that I was weak? You would have been mistaken—you are mistaken if you do not think of me as being strong. You have yet to know me, Byron. You have yet to learn that I am not as other women. Vanity? I have not the vanity that carries on so many women to their doom. I detest flattery—that is not like other women, is it? I like you to be near me because you are unlike other men. You have never flattered me, and you do not look to me for that flattery which every woman has flung at you. I have seen them fling their flatteries in your face—you were

bespattered by it ; but I knew that you would wash off the marks with a single dip of your sponge. Did you expect flattery ? Did you get flattery ? ”

“ ‘ Mad—bad and dangerous to know ’—truth, my Will-o’-the-Wisp,” said he.

“ That was not flattery, at any rate, and I wrote it, and told you that I wrote it,” she cried. “ I take back no word. You were all that I wrote when I wrote it ; but I have changed you, and you know it. Are you the same as you were ten days ago, Byron—tell me that ? ”

“ I don’t think that I am quite the same,” he replied, after a pause. He found himself unable to answer her at once. Her question had startled him. Was it possible that he had changed since that night when he had first seen her ?

“ My poor boy,” she said, laying both her hands upon one of his ; “ I know what your life has been. ‘ Mad—bad ’—does not that describe it ? You knew nothing of what it was to have a home. The place which you inherited was just the opposite to what a home should be. Since you became a man you have never known what it is to have a woman for your friend. I have begun to teach you that ; and yet when you have had a single glimpse of the delight of such a friendship in the centre of a home—when I have tried to bring to you the sweet influence that you have missed all your life, you tell me that you are sorry you have come hither to-day. Well, if you are sorry—if you are wilful enough to desire to go back to your old lonely life—among the flatterers whom you despise—the women who look on you—and you know it—only as the freak of the hour whose presence at their routs they use as a bait to attract shoals of silly fish—if you prefer all this to—to what I can offer you—then go ! ”

She rose from her seat with a fine expression of scorn on her face, and pointed to the door.

He caught her other hand, and throwing himself on his knees beside her, covered it with kisses.

She looked down at him. The mask of scorn had slipped from her face and it now wore a look of exquisite tenderness. She laid her hand on his head, and smoothed it for some moments ; then she gently put back the curls from his forehead, and stooping down, kissed him there, not passionately, but with all the gentleness of a sister.

CHAPTER VIII

EVERYONE in the town, except the young woman's husband, seemed to have something to say regarding the poet's attachment to Lady Caroline Lamb, the wife of the Honourable William Lamb, son of Lord Melbourne, and late member of Parliament for Port-arlington. In a week or two it was the subject of gossip, then it was regarded as a scandal, and then it entered into the regions of romance, and was accepted as an incident affecting only the poet and the lady, and perhaps—in a distant and immaterial way—the lady's husband.

Byron was seen with her every day. The lady, after a week or two, seemed to think more of being seen with him than of being with him. She made people understand with practical clearness that if they were anxious to add to the interest of their social functions by the presence of the author of "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*," they should invite Lady Caroline Lamb as well. Some of them had a distinct objection to the lady, not that they believed any of the whispers which had rustled round society respecting her—the very breath that comes from a whisper is sometimes enough to cause a film to overspread the silver surface of a woman's reputation—but simply because Lady Caroline was too uncertain in her ways to be altogether a pleasant guest. It was her temper rather than her temperament that made people uneasy until they had seen her safe in her carriage again after an entertainment.

She soon let it be understood that she was aware of

the fact that her social value had increased by the attachment of friendship which had come into existence between the great poet and herself. And it was undoubtedly a fact. She answered his invitations for him. And it soon became known that she had improved his manners. He had been accustomed to neglect the punctilio of society, accepting invitations and not acting up to his acceptances, or arriving an hour or two late for a dinner which he had promised to attend. But quickly all this was changed. People said that if Lady Caroline had been his own wife she could not have amended his manners more effectively than she did ; and this was probably true. She took care that he came to the places where he was due, and that he came in proper time, for she brought him with herself. Hostesses praised her, and so did their other guests, who in the old days had been forced to eat cold soup and cremated chickens, owing to the thoughtlessness of the dilatory Lord Byron.

Soon the discovery was made that the poet and the lady made a most picturesque pair, and the picture possessed the merit of traditional accuracy, so to speak. The fact was recalled by the more erudite of their acquaintance, that the friendship of a poet for a lady who is not his wife constitutes a biographical incident that cannot be overlooked in any memoir of the former ; and they affirmed that of this fact no one was more fully aware than Lady Caroline Lamb.

“Laura,” whispered Mme. de Staël to Lord Holland, as Lady Caroline passed them by with a smile, with Byron on her arm, one evening at Lady Jersey’s. “Laura ! She is playing Laura to his Petrarch—and so she is—a copy of Laura done by a schoolgirl with a pencil on a slate.”

Lord Holland laughed.

“I wonder who will come with the sponge to wipe her out,” said he.

“We shall see,” said Madame. “English society

contains plenty of sponges, and a slate pencil does not bite so deep as Mr. Finden's graver."

"Beatrice ; she is playing the part of Beatrice to Byron's Dante," was the comment of another sapient observer—this time it was the beautiful Lady Oxford, who, it was known, had ambitions herself in the direction of the poet, whom she approached through the agency of her child, the lovely Iolanthe.

"A Beatrice—a Beatrice cut out of tissue paper with a blunt scissors," asserted her confidant.

The erudition of the circle was not equal to a greater strain than the recalling of the cases of Laura and Petrarch and Beatrice and Dante ; and they knew that the historical researches of Lady Caroline did not go beyond their own. She did not need to go any farther than these cases. She was quite satisfied to be recorded by all biographers of the author of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" as his Laura or his Beatrice, and when she found that her poet suffered himself to be led by her withersoever she desired to lead him, her ambition was satisfied, for she was convinced that the world was talking with bated breath of the influence which she had upon him—she could hear them wondering what his next poem would be like—would it reflect very plainly the result of the meeting of his mind and hers ? That was how she put it : the meeting of their minds. She had hungered for literary distinction. Now she was about to obtain it. Whatever his new poem would be she was convinced that critics, without being more sapient than critics usually are, would say that the influence of Lady Caroline Lamb was apparent in many of its greatest passages.

In any case she made up her mind that he would dedicate the poem to her, and she knew that a poem's dedication lives as long as the poem itself. This fact, she knew, makes it worth any young woman's while to go to a certain amount of trouble in order to

have the work of a great poet dedicated to herself. When the means which she adopts for effecting her object are such as enable her to partake of a great deal of innocent enjoyment, and to have a considerable share in the honour done to the poet in his lifetime, the burden of sharing the immortality of his work is not one that is grievous to be borne.

That is what a good many people remarked in the course of their discussion, with the usual smiles and knowing head-shakings, of the poet and his friendship. They suggested that the friendship was a very delightful one for the lady, and they were right. There were others who said that it was a very delightful one for the poet, and these were also right. The emotions of the lady's husband were regarded as negligible. Now and again there came a report that he had remonstrated with her ; but as it was generally known that all his married life, from the moment that he had left the altar with her by his side, after endeavouring to soothe the prelate, whom she had grossly affronted, was one continual remonstrance, it was not supposed that the detail which touched upon Lord Byron was one of any importance. She still lived with him and the Melbournes at Melbourne House, and Byron visited her almost every day and extended his friendship to all the members of the family.

He felt every day that the prospect which she had held out to him had been realised. He was participating for the first time in his life in the happiness of a home. If Lady Caroline was a sister to him, Lady Melbourne was much more of a mother to him than his own mother had ever been. She was even more of a mother to him than the younger lady was a sister ; and this was probably why, after their delightful friendship had continued for several months, she ventured to point out to him the possibility of ill-natured persons gossiping on this sacred subject, to the detriment of himself and of her family. She said nothing about

the detriment to Lady Caroline, knowing as she did that an extra word or two of gossip could matter little to her.

“ My dear Byron,” she said, one day, when she was alone with him. “ I have been thinking a good deal about you and your visits to us, and I feel that I should tell you that the result of my consideration of the matter is to make me feel that we have been extremely selfish in regard to you. It has been so agreeable to all of us to have your society that we have shut our eyes to the possibilities of harm coming of your visits.”

“ Harm ? ” he cried. “ Dear Lady Melbourne, you do not think of shutting me out from the only good influence that has ever come into my life ? ”

“ Good influence ? That is just the question which disturbs me,” said Lady Melbourne. “ Can that influence be accounted as good which permits of a man of genius frittering away his days in idleness ? Will posterity hold us guiltless when it is known that we admitted you to this house, day after day, to no purpose—to spend your time in a boudoir chattering about nothing that is of the least consequence in the world—playing games with the children—”

“ The children—I believe that they have changed my nature—they have done more for me than all the divines—than all the philosophers—”

“ That is all very well ; but it is necessary for you to show to the world how greatly you have profited by their influence.”

“ Oh, the world ! I can afford to despise the world.”

“ You cannot afford to despise yourself, Byron, and if the influence of the children—of this household —has been exercised in a right direction, you will soon be despising yourself. ‘ Hours of Idleness ’—that was the name of your early poems, but those meant hours of work. Your real profitless hours of idleness

only began when you became intimate with us in this house. Dear Byron, I am much older than you, and I have had experience of the world, and of all the most notable men and women of our time, and I give you the result of my life when I tell you, in all kindness, and with all feelings of true affection, that you were never in greater danger than you are at present."

He laughed, but uneasily; and then he frowned before saying—

"Danger? danger of what, my dear lady?"

"Danger of deterioration," she replied. "Danger of losing every sense of responsibility."

"Responsibility—for what?—to whom?" he said.

"To yourself, to begin with—to Heaven, by whom you were endowed with genius—to the world, which you are cheating out of its due. Do you think that it is a light thing to be a poet and a genius, Byron? Do you think that you were so endowed for the gratification of yourself alone?"

"I take a humbler view of my gifts, madam, such as they are."

"Then you do a great wrong to Heaven. Heaven has endowed you with its most precious gift to mortals. A poet is a man sent from God to convey His message to men. A poet is God's trumpet to sound into the uttermost parts of the earth. A poet is an interpreter between God and man, and no one knows that better than yourself, Byron, however you may scoff at poets in general, and talk cynically of yourself. Those very elements in 'Childe Harold' which some people call sceptical, tell me that you take a true and an exalted view of your vocation. Well, now you have the ear of the world, and yet instead of making the most of your opportunity, you are frittering away your time in this house. Forgive me if I have spoken to you with frankness.

You know that I have only spoken to you as I would to my own son."

"I thank you for the compliment which you have paid to me, my dear lady," said Byron, kissing her hand. He was deeply touched by the earnest way in which she had spoken to him, although some things that she said stung him sharply, feeling as he did that they were true. "Indeed, I thank you; but you are mistaken in believing that I take so exalted a view of anything that I have written, even though I awoke one morning and found myself famous. I have made up my mind that I shall never write another line."

"And that is the result of the good influence which you tell me your visits to this house have had upon you?" said Lady Melbourne.

"I do not say that I have come to this determination solely on account of my delightful association with your household, Lady Melbourne," he said slowly. "It is the result of a resolution which I made some time ago."

Lady Melbourne looked at him for some moments curiously, and then laughed gently.

"You talk as if it were in your own power to stop making poetry," she said. "Your determination amuses me. The trumpet made a resolution that never again would it utter a note to rally the drooping ranks of the army; but the moment that liberty was in danger there came a trumpet blast in the ears of the nation that slept; the trumpet found out that it was not its own master—that there was a Power behind it that made it sound as He pleased. My dear Byron, I know you better than you know yourself. If I thought that you would have it in your power to keep your resolution, I would tell you to leave this house at once, and never to cross its threshold again; but I know that you have heard the voice that all true poets have heard—the voice that calls, and you cannot choose but obey its summons. Will you

tell me that you have never heard that voice calling to you, Byron?"

He became more uneasy than ever. He looked away from her and bit his nails nervously, as was his habit. He rose from his seat and walked across the room to the window. There was a long silence. He gave a sigh, quite failing to stifle it.

"Ah, here is Caroline back from her ride at last," he said.

"Let her come," said Lady Melbourne. "I know that, in spite of Caroline, you sometimes even now hear that mysterious voice whispering to you as you heard it before; and I know that when it calls to you one day you will not be able to resist its summons. Now I have uncharged my soul. I have warned you."

"You have purged yourself from all responsibility, my dear lady," said he. "My sins will be visited on myself only."

"That is impossible," said she. "The world is so ordered that a man's sins cannot be confined to himself alone. His acts affect others as well. They suffer for him."

"Unto the third and fourth generation," said Byron. "That upsets all our ideas of justice. But that is how things are ordered. One man eats his cake and another suffers the indigestion."

Then Lady Caroline entered the room. She had been riding in the Park, and had expected to meet Byron there; forgetting that he had told her that he was to breakfast with Mr. Hobhouse, who had been with him for some time on his travels. She was very angry with him because of her forgetfulness. She pouted in order to be petted, and when he did not show himself quite as ready as he usually was to admit himself in the wrong, she stormed very prettily, setting him laughing; and then became tearful; at which he promised to stay for lunch; and so throughout the day the comedy of disconnections—the farce of

the illogical—was played, and being both the actor and the audience, he was greatly diverted ; though as he was driven back to St. James's Street to dress, in order to be her companion at a great reception the same night, he was graver than he had been at any time during the day.

All that Lady Melbourne had said came back to him. He felt that every word she had spoken was true. He was frittering his days away quite unworthily ; and, moreover, with the wasting of his time he was encouraging people in their nodding and whispering every time that he and Lady Caroline entered a room together. So far as he himself was concerned, he did not mind the innuendoes of these people ; but Lady Melbourne had hinted at the possibility of harm coming to others through his acts. . . .

He was not a lively companion for Lady Caroline for the rest of the evening ; but for her part she did not care greatly if he were lively or the opposite. She was quite content to be seen with him, and to prevent some odiously beautiful women whom she knew to have designs upon him from having more than a few minutes' conversation with him. She had had some evidence of the infatuation of more than one attractive woman for Byron—she had found a letter on his table one day when she was calling at his rooms, and she had not scrupled to read it ; and at another time she noticed that he was wearing a woman's jewel dangling beside his own seal ; and he refused, with many a tantalising suggestion of intrigue, to tell how he had acquired it. She was always jealous of her influence upon him, and she was not clever enough to know that only by the exercise of toleration, and by a knowledge of when to turn away her head, and when to close her eyes, can a woman retain her hold upon a man, whether that man be her lover or only her husband.

People said that poor Byron could not call his soul

his own ; but these were for the most part the women of engaging manners who had been warned off the course, as the sporting men put it, by Lady Caroline. Others said that as Byron had written a poem to prove that men have no souls, it was only a just retribution that had fallen upon him now in the form of that soul-snatcher with the air of a saint.

These were people who were ever on the side of true religion, and who, in the secret depths of their own hearts, felt that they would be glad to change places with Byron, atheism and all. Only, of course, they would take very good care that Lady Caroline Lamb did not make fools of them, as she certainly was making of Lord Byron.

But Lord Byron was on his way to wisdom, as every man is who begins to feel that he has been making a fool of himself—he did not accuse Lady Caroline of anything.

CHAPTER IX

IT was some days later that they had a little quarrel that passed beyond the limits of their usual brother-and-sister recriminations, which invariably ended in a teasing imploration for forgiveness and an entrancing "making friends" again, with, perhaps, an outburst of gaiety and a will-o'-the-wisp dance by the lady. But this was different.

It is certain that something happened to disturb her before Byron arrived; and her little girl, who was in her boudoir, had not been made very happy. He arrived late, excusing himself by saying he had been overtaken by Rogers, who had a good deal to say to him, as they had not had an opportunity of conversing for some months.

"And so you waited to listen to him when you were due to be here?" she said.

"Yes," he replied. "But I assure you I left him before we had exhausted our topics; we are to clear off all arrears at dinner on Friday."

"You have not promised to dine with him on Friday?" she cried. "Friday is the day of Mrs. Lambton's ball; you are coming there with me."

"Confound it!" said he. "Why will people ask me to dances? Is it to humiliate me, knowing that I cannot join with the jackanapes in hopping about a blowsy woman till we are both blown? I will go to Rogers' dinner, and if I have time I may look in at the Lambtons' on my way home."

"Do you expect that I will consent to so absurd

an arrangement?" she cried. "You shall not dine with Mr. Rogers and his coterie, to talk scandal half the night. You shall accompany me to the Lambtons', Byron."

"I am very sorry," said Byron, "but I promised Rogers. Sheridan is to be one of us, and Campbell, and Moore, and a few others. Heavens! Caroline, when such fare as this is at one side of the road and the Lambtons' ball on the other, which would I choose, can you fancy?"

"The very fact of your asking such a question indicates your intention to wound me, and you know it," she cried. "You forget that I shall be at the Lambtons'."

"Oh no!" he said, smiling; "I am not so impolite."

"If you remember it you are more impolite still," said she.

"You place me on the horns of a dilemma," he said, with a humorous imitation of a Frenchman's shrug. "If I say that I forgot that you were going to the Lambtons', I disgrace myself; if I say that I remembered, I shall hurt your feelings. I think, my Caroline, that this is one of the times when a man should be silent. These times occur more frequently in a man's life than he knows of."

"That is quite true. One of the times was when you met Mr. Rogers and rashly agreed to dine with him; for you are not going to dine with him."

"I don't think that dove-coloured robe suits you on such a dull day as this," said Byron, playing with one of her sleeves.

She snatched her arm away with an exclamation.

"Do you fancy that I will give in to you because you object to the shade of my robe?" she cried.

"If I were anxious to propitiate a woman I should never make the first advance by assuring her that her dress did not become her," said Byron.

"Then you do not want to propitiate me?"

"Why should I? You never stand in need of being propitiated. You are always—on the margin of reasonableness."

She flared up.

"You delight in saying everything that will pique me," she cried. "You fancy that I am wholly in your power—that you may affront me at your will, but I will show you that—that—"

She flounced out of the room; but she did not flatter herself when she fancied that she did it very prettily. She was woman enough to know that men are apt to regard as insipid a woman who chooses to remain placid in all circumstances. Byron had shown himself to be the poet of storm rather than of calm. She believed (and rightly) that she had wearied him during the first few months of their friendship by her manifest desire to please him. She hoped that it was not yet too late to make a diversion.

It was not. Byron was quite diverted by the flashing of her will-o'-the-wisp lightning. She heard him laugh quite pleasantly before she had reached the corridor.

But the little girl who was left alone with Byron showed signs of taking her mother's mood rather seriously. She had had previous experience of the same lady, and knew that she had some reason for alarm. She looked at Byron and came to the conclusion that his merriment was artificial, or else he did not know her mother. She shook her head, and began to sob. Byron had her in his arms in a moment, soothing her by her favourite story of a giant killing people, and then by singing her an Albanian lullaby. In a very short time he had soothed her so completely that she would not leave him, but lay with her head of golden curls on his shoulder, a little chubby arm about his neck, the prettiest nestling imaginable.

She was not so greatly interested in the Albanian lyric as she had been in the story of the giant's carnage and voracity, and soon her eyes closed. He looked down at her with all the pride of his achievement. He had never heard of a man's putting a child asleep. He continued his lilt in a lower tone, fearful lest the little one should awaken to weep ; he had heard of men (fathers, too) running away from a crying child. The incantation continued to work, however, and he soon became aware of the fact that an infant of three is a considerable burden when asleep in the arms of a man who has been nursing her in a constrained position, with a bent back and feet only touching the floor with their toes.

He was beginning to manœuvre for a more natural pose, still crooning his lullaby, when the door opened quickly. His back was toward it, and he could not, without disturbing the child, turn round to warn the intruder. He could only hold up one finger beyond his shoulder, whispering, " H'sh ! h'sh ! I will not have the child aroused, however penitent you may be, madam."

Then he resumed his chant, and soon began to marvel at the silence of the one who had entered the room. If it was Lady Caroline, she had certainly become penitent beyond all precedent—with an inartistic want of reserve.

He turned his head round, bending it back at the side of his chair until he could see to the door. Then it was he found that it was not the child's mother who was there ; it was a young and pretty girl who wore her hair in ringlets that flowed from beneath a hat of much simpler design than any Lady Caroline affected. She had advanced only a few steps, and was standing with a rather frightened expression on her face.

She flushed crimson when Byron looked at her, and he was even in advance of her in this respect.

She was a complete stranger to him, and he was certainly in an unusual position. Some moments had passed before he regained sufficient self-possession to say, jerking his head round as before, very awkwardly—

“Pray come in; Lady Caroline will be here presently, I am sure.”

“Thank you, my lord,” said the girl, rather nervously, but advancing a few steps; “but—but—I knew that she was not here—I knew that you were here alone.”

“Not quite alone,” said he. “But—I am not sure that—”

“Oh, you never met me before, if that is what you are thinking,” she said. “My name is Annabella Milbanke. Lady Melbourne is my father’s sister. I have only been in town for a few days. I heard of you, Lord Byron, and—and—”

She became very nervous; he could hear her quick breathing. He did his best to place her at her ease, though he was far from being at ease himself. The child was amazingly heavy. He felt an attack of cramp coming on.

“Of course—of course,” he said. “I am only sorry that your curiosity—that is, the interest which you are good enough to take in me—you will pardon my rising—you see—the pretty little soul was troubled about—something, and fell asleep in my arms. You have doubtless read about that unhappy Childe Harold and become interested in—”

“I read ‘Childe Harold,’ and it shocked me—I think it dreadful,” said the young lady, with a pretty primness.

He was amused.

“And, therefore, you were anxious to see the dreadful author?” said he. “Yes, and alone—you admitted just now that you knew that I was alone. Miss Milbanke, you are a—a woman.”

"I made up my mind that it was my duty to come to you, Lord Byron—my mother did not know of my resolution," said the girl. "It may have been wrong of me not to tell her; but I felt that I should do my best to see you, so that I might say how wrong you have been—"

"H'sh!" he whispered, for she had raised her voice and was speaking with great earnestness. "H'sh! it will never do to visit my sins upon so sweet a little head as this; I would not have her awakened for worlds; and indeed, Miss Milbanke, I am not worth all the trouble to which you have put yourself."

"Any person who has the power of—of—doing so much mischief as you have is worth saving, if only on account of the poor people who may be led astray," said the girl. "Lord Byron, I am very young and I am country bred; I have had no experience of the world; but I know how good religion is for everybody and how dreadful it is for anyone to scoff—the more beautiful the poetry is the more wicked it becomes, leading innocent people to scoff—and your poetry is very beautiful. That is what makes it so bad—so sad."

He could see that tears were trembling in her eyes. She spoke with vehemence, but her attitude and tone were not those of the one who denounces, but of the one who entreats. Her hands became clasped—he felt that the gesture was not premeditated, but it took away in a moment from the primness of the appearance of this earnest little lady.

The picture in that daintily decorated room—panels painted after Lady Diana Beauclerk's designs of playing children, every child a Cupid, and gilt chairs upholstered in pink damasked silk—would have seemed queer, had anyone been present to see it. The poet whose name was on everyone's lips, who was being idolised by the most distinguished society in the world,

and denounced in many pulpits, sat in his constrained attitude over the child so that her head could rest comfortably on his shoulder and her little white arm still encircle his neck; and a few yards away that graceful girl stood with imploring hands before him, her face flushed and her eyes brimming with tears.

And both of them recognising the fact that the child must on no account be awakened, their voices seeming all the more intense by the necessity to keep them subdued.

“What am I to say to you, Miss Milbanke?” said Byron. “I feel inclined to say anything that you may suggest to me—to give you any promise that you may ask me to make to you—yes, unto the half—nay, the whole—of my kingdom—my little empire of metre, and I myself will retire to any Elba that you may assign to me.”

“I expected that you would make a mock of me,” said the girl. “Your poetry sounds like that of a mocking spirit who looks upon the world and all that it contains as nothing more than a grim jest. I made up my mind that I would not be deterred by your mocking of me, and you have not been half as bad as I expected.”

“Believe me, I am not mocking you, Miss Milbanke,” said he. “Every word that I spoke just now I meant. I cannot deny anything that you have said. ‘Childe Harold’ has made me famous; but I have come to think of such fame in the light of infamy. I have made up my mind to write no more. I have already withdrawn much of what I have already written, because I found that it was giving offence. I am not sure that I shall not withdraw ‘Childe Harold.’”

“Oh no, no,” cried the girl, so eagerly that the child in Byron’s arms made an uneasy move. He held up a warning finger, and Miss Milbanke lowered her voice. “I did not mean you to go as far as that

—oh no ; you must not think of giving up writing poetry. Could you do it ? I wonder if you could do it. I always thought that great poets were like —like—the Hebrew prophets—one of them declared that he had nothing to do with it—that he was simply the messenger of God.”

“ But how if a poet becomes the messenger of the Evil One, Miss Milbanke ? ”

“ He must change—that is all. He must write for the glory of God. I would not for the world have you withdraw ‘ Childe Harold ’—it is so beautiful in parts—it is all true poetry—if I did not feel that it was so great would I have braved all as I have done in order to implore of you to—to write nothing more like it, but to use your splendid powers—?—oh, I feel that I have fallen into the strain of a preacher—commonplace—everyone has been saying that you should employ your gifts in a right direction, and things like that. I meant to say something different—to ask you if you do not think that it would be nobler to write a single verse that would give true comfort to some weary soul—a single verse to make the simple life of a man or woman seem brighter—than to write a great poem whose tendency is to make people doubt—to induce people to mock.”

“ I feel that it would—I feel that you are right in this matter, Miss Milbanke.”

“ Oh, Lord Byron ! ” she cried, with whispered intensity; “ look down at that little one which is in your arms and ask yourself if you would like to see her grow up believing all that ‘ Childe Harold ’ would lead people to believe.”

“ God forbid ! ” said Byron. “ She is a sweet child. I hope you do not think that she is contaminated by being in the arms of the wretch who wrote ‘ Childe Harold ’ ? ”

“ Now you are mocking again,” she said.

“ Come hither and kiss the child, Miss Milbanke,”

said he. "I kissed her before she slept. I should like you to kiss her now."

Only for a moment did the girl show any hesitation. She walked slowly to where he was sitting, and knelt on the carpet, putting her lips down among the masses of golden spirals that fell around the child's face, and kissing her on her little cheek, hot and flushed in sleep.

"A white butterfly alighting with infinite tenderness on a pink sleeping flower," whispered Byron. "I knew that I could trust you not to awaken her."

But there was another one at the door whom he could not so trust. The door was flung open and she almost sprang into the room, and stood glaring at the tableau before her.

The child stirred uneasily. Byron raised his hand, saying—

"Hush! You make such a noise!"

"What has brought you hither, pray, Belle Milbanke?" cried Lady Caroline. "Who invited you to my boudoir? Let me tell you that for all your primness and propriety—"

"The child is awake—I knew that you would awake her," cried Byron.

"We are all awake, my Lord Byron, though you and this silly chit seemed to fancy that I would shut my eyes to your assignation," shrieked Lady Caroline.

"Caroline, you forget yourself," said Miss Milbanke, with all the dignified severity of a small woman.

"You are a pretty censor—you, alone in this room with Lord Byron," cried Caroline.

"Miss Milbanke came as a pretty censor, and she spoke with good sense, as all censors should," said Byron. "If she will allow me I shall accompany her to Lady Melbourne's drawing-room."

"That will be a lapse into propriety," sneered Caroline. "She will, I fear, find it insipid after an

hour of the solitary society of the lively Lord Byron. Do not go down with her, Byron."

"I cannot allow Miss Milbanke to go alone. You have suggested that she came as a visitor to me, and you were right. That makes it incumbent on me to accompany her to Lady Melbourne," said Byron, going to the door. Miss Milbanke was already there.

"You fool! I made the suggestion on behalf of the girl," cried Caroline. "I want to save her from the consequence of her own indiscretion. She is but a girl. Byron, stay, I command you."

Miss Milbanke had left the room, Byron was following her, when Lady Caroline sprang between him and the door with the fierce agility of a wild cat. She banged the door and locked it in his face. Then, holding up the key, she burst into a fit of laughter, dancing before him in her old fashion, waving the key in his face. His face had become very pale.

He looked at her for a few moments; he seemed in doubt what he should do. Was he to make the attempt to take the key from her? He knew that that was what she wanted him to do; she could easily elude him, and so she would place him in even a more humiliating position than that which he occupied when made a prisoner by her. Should he try to cajole her into opening the door? He swore to himself that he would get out by the window before adopting such tactics with her.

He went away from the door, took the hand of the wondering little girl and seated himself on the nearest chair.

"You are my prisoner, my lord," cried the woman. "Are you content? Tell me that you are content, and I shall release you."

He made no reply. He stroked the child's hair.

"Innocence—you always were fond of innocence," she said. "And as if the children here were not

enough for you, you must needs have Belle Milbanke in your train ! The impudent hussy !—in my very room ! What next, I wonder ! What had she to say to you ? She began, of course, by warning you against me—I know her. She has tried to lecture me before now. I know her—flaunting her innocence in my face ! She heard that you were dangerous—that was the attraction. What danger could there be to her with her triple armour of innocence ! Her plain face—that's a far better protection to her than all her armour of innocence. She's plain, is she not, Byron ? ”

He made no answer. She flounced away from him, and sat on her little sofa, her back turned to him, her feet tapping the parquet. The child stood with a finger in her mouth, looking alternately at Byron and her mother.

In the course of five minutes of silence the tapping of her foot became intermittent, and then ceased altogether. The sound of a little sob came from her—there was the fluttering of a dainty piece of cambric—then a little choking cry—then a thunder-storm of passionate sobs and tears and moans—interjected words—incomplete phrases—“ Miserable wretch ! ”—“ Wretched woman that I am ! ”—“ My best friend ! ”—“ The only friend I ever had ! ”—“ Dead—dead—dead—all the sweet past dead ! ”—“ Nothing to live for now ! ”—“ Oh, fool, fool, fool that I was ! ”—“ No ; mad—that is it—I was mad—mad ! ”—“ Oh, Byron, come to me, if you would save my life ! come to me—no, I will go to you—I will kneel to you—plead for forgiveness—plead for my life ! See, I throw myself at your feet—”

And she would have thrown herself at his feet, if he had not prevented her. He had a man's horror of a scene with a hysterical woman. He did everything he could think of to tranquillise her. It was he who needed forgiveness for his brutality, he declared.

The fault was his—she had only been too good to him, and so forth—all the ready perjuries which come so pat to a man's lips when a woman has made a fool of him, and he knows it, and wants to escape from the sight of her kneeling to him. Perjury? He would have gone much farther to escape—merely to free himself from the abnormalities of contrition with which she threatened him.

At last he succeeded in calming her. She sat beside him, and he held her hand. Her tears ceased. An April smile came to her face as she showed him the little damp ball that had been her cambric handkerchief. She flung it across the room. She patted her little girl on the head and made her nestle against her. Later she gave the child the key and told her to put it into the keyhole of the door; and when the tiny fingers fumbled at their task she laughed with Byron, and then ran to help her, showing her how to insert the key and turn it, unlocking the door.

Of course he did not make a rush for freedom. But when, a quarter of an hour later, he found himself outside the house, he felt a greater relief than he could express, except through the medium of verse. He made a noteworthy attempt some years later in this direction.

While he was driving to St. James's Street, his mind was running, not upon the scene in which he had taken rather a prominent part, but upon some of the natural beauties of the *Ægean*, which he remembered well. There was a sheltered little island which he had drifted past one evening—an island that peeped up out of the blue waters—a place of peace. He was filled with a great longing to try to find that island, and to make himself a resting-place among the tangles of its wild vines. He thought of the Hellespont. It was a broad piece of water, and he had enjoyed emulating the feat of Leander in crossing

it—Leander had swum across it to reach the lady. Byron wondered how much broader the Hellespont would have required to be to deter him from making the attempt to get away from a woman who had bothered him.

CHAPTER X

HE thought that it would not be wise to show her how he had been affected by the short time which they had spent in each other's company upon this rather exciting day. He had come to have the same experience of her that a good many other people had gained before he had returned from his travels ; and he knew that, under the influence of the sudden shock of finding that she had lost her power over him, she would put herself to a considerable amount of trouble in endeavouring to convince him that it did not rest with him alone to break his bonds—that she would have to be taken into account before he could feel the joy of freedom. He feared her resentment, knowing as he did that it would not be limited by any consideration except that of making him suffer, and of showing as many of their friends as were available, that she was making him suffer. He had a fear of her ingenuity in devising some scheme to put him in the wrong in the eyes of those of their friends who did not know her any better than he had known her in the early days of their friendship. Supposing that she were to throw herself on her knees in front of him at some great reception—calling him her Byron and upbraiding him for having deserted her—what joy would his freedom bring to him in such circumstances ?

And then there was always the possibility of her seeing him in the theatre. He remembered now how highly amused he had been at the story which had been told

to him of how she had interrupted the performance one night to upbraid an opponent of her husband in the House of Commons. He had been highly amused by the narration, and it had added to the interest which Lady Caroline had already acquired in his eyes. But now, as the dreadful possibility of the scene being repeated—with a slight change of personnel among the actors—occurred to him, he felt far from being amused.

Yes, until he should make arrangements for flying to that exquisite island, over which an everlasting peace seemed to hover, spreading the wings of a dove over the weary mortals who lay down among the fig-trees and vines to breathe the soft scents of an azure summer sea—until he was safe aboard the *caïque*, it would be unwise to make a move to attain his freedom. All the bonds which are woven by a Delilah do not become as green withes on the limbs of the man she has captivated. Samson was a strong man and a great humourist, but he would not have acted so greatly to his own detriment if he had temporised a little longer with the lady.

Then there was the case of the artful Ulysses, who had an experience that proved that even a tranquil island may have its Circe—if Ulysses had acted circumspectly, he would have been spared a considerable amount of trouble.

The sum of his consideration of his position, by the aid of classical lore, was to make him feel that he should not be abrupt; and after all, Caroline Lamb had more than a little charm; she had a beauty that was wholly her own, and above all she had two delightful children. Of course, Lady Oxford, with whom he was on terms of increasing friendship, was very lovely, and her little girl—he conferred on her the immortality of a dedication, calling her Ianthe—was exquisite; still he felt that Lady Caroline should not be treated abruptly.

And so he went to her the next day; and learned from her own lips that if he had not come to her she would have gone to him. She behaved so prettily to him that he went away feeling quite glad that he had not been abrupt with her—that he had been sufficiently self-possessed not to lay an undue emphasis upon the occurrences of the day before. Of course he had resolved to throw off her shackles—they were silken shackles, but still cramping—it was necessary, however, to act with caution.

That very evening he met Miss Milbanke at Holland House. Perhaps he may have been desirous of showing this young lady that, although she might possibly think that he had played an indifferent part in the little comedy in the boudoir, he had still his independence; at any rate—Lady Caroline being absent from his side for a short time—he took the trouble to cross the salon in order to greet her.

She was clearly pleased by his attention, and presented him to her father and mother.

“I had the honour to meet Lord Byron yesterday at Aunt Augusta’s,” she said, and then she went on to talk to him as though their parting on the previous day had been of the most conventional type, and quite devoid of those elements of exhilaration which it undoubtedly possessed.

He had no notion of avoiding in conversation with her the topic of Lady Caroline’s behaviour.

“I fear that she was very rude to you, Miss Milbanke,” said he apologetically—he somehow seemed to suggest that it was right that he should apologise for her.

Miss Milbanke became rather frigid.

“I considered that it was really to you she was most rude, Lord Byron,” she said. “I am a sort of relation of hers—Mr. Lamb’s cousin, as no doubt you know—and she has had more than one opportunity of saying hateful things about me. I did

not pay much attention at any time to what she said. I have always detested her affectations—especially her affectations of wickedness. I think that the woman who tries to make out that she is worse than she really is, is quite detestable."

"Lady Caroline is so impulsive, that at times she cannot but run the chance of hurting people's feelings," said he.

"If she did not go farther than merely to run the chance, she would be vastly disappointed," said Miss Milbanke, with just a suggestion of bitterness to barb her shaft.

"She is witty, and people who are witty—"

"Yes, I suppose they should be judged from the standpoint of a wit, not from the standpoint of a gentlewoman. The most witty things ever said sound to my ears extremely ill-natured. As for yesterday—but I feel that it was I who drew her anger down upon myself. I have been feeling all night that I was very silly—I really think that I was rude—in obtruding myself upon you yesterday; and yet the week before, when I had risen warm from reading 'Childe Harold,' my scheme did not seem so absurd. I felt that I must write to you, and I composed several letters, but tore them all up; they did not satisfy me. Then it was that I resolved to see you, and—well, I was fortunate enough—or unfortunate enough—to see you, and you know the rest."

"I know that you are the first person—woman or man—who ever succeeded in telling me the truth—what I have myself felt to be the truth, Miss Milbanke. You may assume that your kindly mission, undertaken on my behalf, succeeded in impressing me so deeply that, as I told you, I mean to take your advice and refrain from writing another line of verse that might possibly give offence to Christian people."

Her face lightened; he thought that with such

a light shining from her eyes she looked altogether handsome. She felt pleased—flattered, perhaps, incidentally ; but there was really no self-consciousness in her expression, nor was there any of that prim self-satisfaction which sits visibly on the face of a woman who has done her duty, and perhaps a little more than her duty.

His liking for this girl was increasing. It was not in his nature to make the attempt to understand why he liked ; he was content to like. He did not perceive that it was because he was beginning to be palled by the affectations of Lady Caroline that he felt it a great relief to be in the company of this girl who was her opposite in every way. Miss Milbanke dressed with Quaker-like severity ; but her enemies said that she would not have shown herself so ready to do so had she not been well aware of the fact that this severity, when carried out through the medium of expensive silks and the rarest muslin, suited her style of beauty. She was a prude, the sisterhood of caprice affirmed, because the rôle went well with thin lips and a pale complexion.

At any rate, she appeared quite attractive to the man who had latterly not come very closely in contact with prudery.

“ You have made me very happy,” she said, after a thoughtful silence, following his serious words. “ And I think that you will be happier also,” she added.

“ When I come to die ? ” he said, smiling.

“ Yes, when you come to die. That was not what was in my mind ; but it is true nevertheless,” she said.

“ I think that you are the sort of girl whom I would like to have near me when I come to die,” said he.

She looked at him, and for a moment he thought that she was about to assure him that he would be much safer in the hands of a clergyman, but that still,

if it were so ordered, she would endeavour to do her duty ; but the expression on her face changed, and she said, smiling—

“ Now you are wearing the expression which I was told was habitual with you—the expression of the gloomy Childe Harold, who was tired of everything wicked before he had begun to look for anything good in the world. I had heard that you were proud, reserved, and austere.”

“ And yet you were not afraid to face me with your message and your rebuke ? ” he said.

“ That was because I felt that—that—well, that I should do so whatever happened,” said she. “ I buoyed myself up with the thought that you had no power to order my head to be cut off in the front of the house, just where Charles the First was beheaded. But when I entered the room and found you putting the child asleep I felt just as if I had come to the wrong house. I was so much surprised that everything which I had meant to say to you went out of my head. I had quite a little speech prepared to hurl at you.”

“ A denunciation ? ”

“ Not exactly ; but I saw at once that it would not meet the case of a man nursing a baby.”

“ And you were disappointed, I am sure.”

“ For a moment. You remember how Jonah was disappointed when the people of Nineveh repented. I think that I sympathised with the prophet for a moment. But when I thought last night what my speech contained I felt very glad that I had no chance of delivering it. Oh, it was very foolish—just what one would fancy might be composed by a girl. I have written essays for my governess, Mrs. Clermont. This was one.”

He laughed at her frankness ; it sounded charming to him. He had been looking across the room ; when he turned to her he found that she had gone to where

her mother was sitting. She had fled like a chick to its mother's wing on its enemy's coming in sight.

Lady Caroline had slipped up the salon, and was now standing just behind him. She was looking at Miss Milbanke over her shoulder.

"You are here?" he said. "I did not observe you coming up."

She never so much as glanced at him. She continued watching the girl, as immovable as a wild cat watching a bird. That was what was in Byron's mind at the moment—a wild cat—rigid—ready to spring. Miss Milbanke was not looking at her, she was answering a question that had been put to her by her mother.

Lady Caroline stood quivering with the cat's excitement, her fingers opening and closing upon each palm—claws.

Byron perceived that the scene which he had dreaded, and used all his strategy to avert, was imminent. The woman took a single, stealthy step toward the girl, and then crouched again, so to speak. He startled her by getting behind her and whispering in her ear—

"Caroline, listen to me before you move another foot. If you speak a single word at this moment to Miss Milbanke, you have seen the last of me. I swear by the heavens above us that I will never be seen in your company again, and I shall take care that it is known that I will never enter a room in which you are. Now you know where you stand."

He spoke in a low, resolute tone, the force of which could hardly be neglected even by Lady Caroline Lamb. She was startled; turning her head and looking at him, she saw her master. The fierceness went out of her eyes. She remained gazing at him as if fascinated. Then by the exercise of a curious instinct, she closed her hands gently, hiding her nails in the velvet hollow. She laughed strangely, with her eyes still fixed upon him.

“Come into the supper-room,” he said.

She did not move.

“Come,” he said.

“Why should I obey you? Why should I follow you?” she cried.

He turned about and walked away. She had only a moment's hesitation. She made haste to get alongside him.

“What,” she said, “is the anchorite Lord Byron turned Sybarite? Is he abandoning his biscuit and soda-water in favour of minced chicken and champagne? Does his lordship seek a partner in his orgy of beeves and muttons? This is a change indeed. Byron the *bon vivant*. But, indeed, Colonel Clifford was telling me just now that when you were so minded you could drink your claret like a lord—like a real lord, not the sort that boasts of brains. But listen to me. I swear to you by the heavens above that if you drink more than two bottles, you shall have seen the last of me.”

She laughed at her own quick parody of his threat; she had done her imitation very neatly; he was amused—in a measure. Behind his diversion, however, there was the solid satisfaction of having averted a disagreeable excitement.

For the next hour he remained with her at the supper table. He had never found her so full of spirits. She sparkled; she rang all the changes upon that carillon of wit which she had at her command when she was at her best. Raillery of the rarest, in a low key, badinage of the briskest, rising a note or two, and quivering in quavers of laughter, with her head thrown back, an arm in the air, gracefully gesticulating, eyes brilliant, sometimes coaxing, another moment, drooping, to match a pout on her pretty lips, and then a satiric phrase or two, the irony that went so well with her lisp, giving it exactly the right emphasis of innocence!

She had never been so amusing since he had come to know her.

"Claret," she cried—"another bottle of claret for my Lord Byron?"

"Not after champagne," he said.

"Champagne? You have tasted nothing but soda-water and hock."

"Champagne, I tell you. By heavens! I have been drinking glass after glass of champagne all the evening. That is how I feel. Can my senses have deceived me? No, no; one cannot have drunk champagne and believed it was merely hock and soda-water. I know the difference. And served in such glass, too! The daintiest that ever came out of Venice—tinkling, tinkling, while the wine is twinkling in roseate beads and bubbles, and the whitest froth that ever made one think of the infant Aphrodite."

"What i' the name of blessedness are you scampering after with your tongue?" she said. "What is it that you are chattering about in allegorical form, Childe Harold?"

"There's only one thing in the world to which I could refer—to wit—the wit of the wittiest creature in England," he cried. "To listen to you, my Caroline, is like drinking champagne out of a Venetian goblet."

She sparkled in exultation of her victory. Belle Milbanke! What a fool she had been to have a moment's jealousy of Belle Milbanke—an insipid miss fresh from the schoolroom, prim with the learning of the school primer, simpering in the joy of her sampler! Belle Milbanke? Cider. What man that has drunk deep of champagne would turn to cider?

And still she had a feeling that Belle Milbanke was somewhere at hand, smiling in that chill, chaste way that she had, all the time that Byron was sitting beside her at the supper table. She felt an unaccountable dread of the girl, which all the froth of gaiety

with Byron failed to dissipate. She had the instinct of a jealous animal quivering with a desire to get its claws into its enemy of the same sex.

With only the smallest pause and a glance round the room to see who was watching her, she plunged into the whirlpool again—laughing—a little louder than before—railing—a trifle harder—mocking somewhat more shrilly. She wished that Belle Milbanke had been in the room. She wanted the girl to be a witness of her triumph. *Psha!* the growl, the snarl, the claws—these were only for the jungle, where victory could only be snatched out of an opponent's teeth and at the expense of much fur and a zig-zag of lacerations. Thank God we are civilised people who can appreciate the joys of an intellectual victory—the victory of wit and cajolery—and wish that our defeated opponent were at hand to witness the subjugation of the Man! But Belle Milbanke remained away, and so Lady Caroline's triumph was shorn of half its glory.

Everyone else at Holland House witnessed it, and heard it. She became very noisy at the end of an hour. The champagne was bubbling over the mouth of the bottle, and its very exuberance made it distasteful to fastidious eyes. Byron felt that he had had enough of the brand which had seemed to him so choice a short time before. The louder she became, the more silent he. When his chance came, he seized it. It came in the form of a summons from the House of Lords. Lord Holland brought it. There was a debate on Emancipation, and all the strength of the Opposition was needed for the discomfiture of the Government. Lord Holland was going in hot haste to support his friends, and so were several of his Whig guests. He wanted Byron.

Byron flung away his napkin and rose from the table.

“*Crede Byron!*” he cried. “My vote, my voice,

my song, my sword—all are on the side of Liberty ! Is your lordship's carriage at the door ? ”

“ You shall not go, Byron,” said Lady Caroline, springing up from the table. “ You shall not go. What are the Irish Catholics to you that you should rush off in this mad fashion ? ”

“ She is a pretty Irishwoman,” said Byron to Lord Holland. “ She would condemn five millions of her countrymen to the shackles which the oppression of centuries has riveted to their limbs, solely that she should have a chance of tasting another cup of ice ! ”

“ Lady Caroline should not complain even if her own husband were to be taken from her side in the cause of Liberty,” said Sheridan, who was one of the emissaries of the Opposition sent to Holland House to find supporters for Lord Melbourne in the House of Lords.

Lord Holland examined the tips of his fingers. Someone at a table hard by laughed.

“ Never mind my husband, Mr. Sheridan,” cried Lady Caroline, turning sharply upon him.

“ Nay, madam,” he replied ; “ I have not a wife's prerogative : he voted on my side with great regularity.”

“ And that is the side of Liberty,” said Byron.

“ Psha ! ” cried Lady Caroline, making a grimace ; “ you look on Liberty as you would on a young woman who is *à la mode*—a pretty creature to coquette with—a dainty thing with a mob cap and short petticoats —like this.”

She picked up a napkin that was already folded up something in the form of a mob cap, placed it on her head, and lifting up her dress beyond her ankles, went strutting with a French swagger across the room.

Everyone laughed ; there was some applause from one of the tables.

“ A perfect performance ! ” said Sheridan. “ An inspiring performance ! Off, my Lord Byron, you

will vote for Liberty, and feel in doing so that you are voting for Lady Caroline. Madam, one word with you. Seriously—I am talking seriously now—I am talking of the playhouse now, not of politics.” His voice sank to a whisper that engrossed her attention. “Why should such unequalled talents be exhibited only to a score of admirers? Drury Lane will be opened in the autumn. There will be an opening address—I believe some fifty or more poets are working at it just now—think what it would be for you to come on the stage in the character of Liberty and repeat an address written by our friend Byron.” He was bending down to her, gradually drawing her away, with many suggestions of secrecy. “Byron would write the address if you were to ask him, and so long as Drury Lane exists it will be remembered that Lady Caroline Lamb and Lord Byron spoke the first words ever uttered on the stage for the public to hear. What is your feeling on the point, Lady Caroline? Whisper it to me, I entreat of you. I would not for the world that it became prematurely known.”

Lady Caroline sank gracefully into the nearest chair, her eyes brilliant, her lips parted, her hands clasped, her face radiant as the face of a bride.

“Mr. Sheridan, trust to me,” she whispered. “Byron will write it for me. Take my word for it, he would not do it unless for me. But he will write it for me. And I will speak it for you, dear Sheridan—only for you. A red mob cap—Liberty—only, of course, adapted to the best class of playgoers—Union Jack Liberty, not a tricolour one. I see it clearly before me. Of course the band will play ‘God Save the King’—that will let the people know at once the kind of Liberty that I am impersonating. I do not mind the short petticoats.”

“Liberty without short petticoats would look as foolish as King Richard without his hump or as a white Othello,” said Sheridan. “But you will be

mum, till our plans are mature. Not a word of this must get out, or all will be lost. But you are a woman of understanding. I wonder if it would be possible to obtain a bottle of his lordship's '77 claret—'The School for Scandal' claret we call it. That was the year that *The School* was first played. Ah! you are too young to remember Mrs. Abington at her best. The most beautiful woman—and such talent. May I be pardoned for saying that in many ways—grace of carriage, brilliancy of style, you remind me very forcibly of Mrs. Abington? I must look after that claret."

Lady Caroline glanced round. She perceived that Byron and Lord Holland had disappeared. Well, that was only reasonable, she admitted. It was not to be expected that they should remain while she was planning surprises with Mr. Sheridan. Surely that was an inspiration of hers—that parody of *Liberty*, she thought. And equally so—only suggested by hers—was Mr. Sheridan's idea respecting the opening scene of Drury Lane. She knew that already people in every direction were discussing the possible address to be spoken on the stage of the new Old Drury. The opening of the theatre would be the most brilliant event of the year, and she would be the central figure upon that occasion. Old Mr. Sheridan was a delightful man—she had never before been able to appreciate his cleverness. He was so ready at taking a hint. He had the quick eye of an artist—the judgment of a man of the world, who knew what would be likely to carry the town. It was the combination of his many gifts that enabled him to perceive that she was the only woman in England who could give true effect to the speaking of an address written in verse by the poet whose name was in everyone's mouth. To be sure Mr. Sheridan was no longer the manager of the theatre; but his voice was all powerful with the Committee.

Meantime Mr. Sheridan had found the claret for which he had gone in search. Among his many gifts the one which was least open to doubt was not his capacity to pronounce a sound judgment on the qualities of claret. As he inhaled the bouquet of the bottle which had been brought to him (in confidence) by Lord Holland's butler, he chuckled over the successful ruse by which he had covered the retreat of Byron. His life had been passed in contriving ruses to cover his own retreat from the claws of tradesmen, and his power of appreciating the weaknesses of men and women, and of playing upon them to his own advantage, was sufficient to inform him that, in dealing with Lady Caroline, he need not be at the trouble to devise anything elaborately subtle. He felt that he was only wheedling a tradesman.

"What have you been doing lately, Mr. Sheridan?" Mr. Campbell, the poet, inquired of him, while he was still smiling over his first bottle of claret.

"I have just been giving a cat a dish of cream," he replied.

Mr. Campbell had never quite come to understand Sheridan's methods; he looked puzzled. He lifted up the edge of the tablecloth and glanced round the table; he sent his eyes straying about the corners of the room. Then he looked at Sheridan's bottle of claret; he had heard of people seeing black cats invisible to normal sight.

"And why did you give the cat the cream, Mr. Sheridan?" he asked.

"To get her to take her claws out of a friend of mine," Sheridan replied. "And now that I come to think of it, it was only water with chalk sprinkled over it."

Mr. Campbell smiled indulgently. He thought it better not to add to his questions. It would be ungenerous to take advantage of the unfortunate gentleman's willingness to betray himself. He did not

leave Mr. Sheridan, however, until the latter had promised to do his best for him in case the Committee of Drury Lane agreed to offer a prize for the most suitable address to be spoken at the opening of the theatre.

Mr. Sheridan spent one half of his days making promises to his friends and his tradesmen, and the other half in evading them.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Byron met Rogers a few days after the Holland House reception his friend expressed his regret at being cut off from the pleasure of entertaining him at dinner on the coming Friday.

"Have you written to me?" said Byron. "I heard nothing about your dinner being put off."

"Nor is it," said Rogers. "But I have seen Lady Caroline Lamb, and she conveyed to me your message."

"I sent no message to you or to anyone else through Lady Caroline Lamb," said Byron.

"What! No message to the effect that you were sorry that you had forgotten your engagement for the same evening, made a month before you had accepted mine?" said Rogers, raising his eyebrows.

"My dear friend," said Byron, putting his arm through Rogers', "when I accepted your invitation I allow that I had forgotten for the moment that I had promised to attend Mrs. Lambton's ball, but had I remembered I should still have agreed to dine with you. A ball! Heavens, man, 'twould be as ridiculous for me to decline your dinner on the plea that I was going to a ball as it would be for a blind man to excuse himself on the plea that he was going to the Royal Academy Celebration at Somerset House. I am beginning to suspect that the hostesses who invite me to balls are but showing how sarcastic they can be at my expense."

"I am afraid that Lady Caroline acquired a wrong idea of your intentions," said Rogers. "I met her yesterday, and she asked me if I had received a letter

from you excusing yourself for Friday. When I replied in the negative she cried out upon your carelessness, and then said that on her reminding you that you were going to Mrs. Lambton's, you had promised to write to me explaining how it was that you had made a mistake, being under the impression that you were free for Friday."

Rogers saw Byron's face become white with anger ; he felt somewhat embarrassed, though why he should feel as if he had suddenly discovered a disagreement between a man and his wife he never could tell. He hastened, with his usual tact, to smooth away the wrinkles that had come over the surface of their friendship, saying—

"Never mind. I have no doubt that Lady Caroline's intention was to save both of us from a misunderstanding ; but I am glad to meet you now and to learn that you will not be prevented from joining my little circle."

"My dear friend," said Byron, still pale, but recovering his self-possession, "I would go to your dinner on Friday even though the consequences of doing so were that I should never attend a ball for the rest of my life ; even though I should never be seen again in public by the side of Lady Caroline Lamb. Oh, I shall be present at your dinner, never fear."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Rogers. "You may depend on the potatoes being the choicest that Covent Garden can produce ; while the vinegar will be of a vintage year—that I can promise you."

Byron laughed, remembering that upon the occasion of his dining for the first time with Rogers he was on a regimen diet that prevented his being able to partake of any of the delicacies of the table with the exception of potatoes and vinegar.

"Like Jeffrey's," said Byron. "The vinegar of the Edinburgh satirists is ever a vintage vinegar, more wholesome than the sugar and water of the *Post*."

Thus they parted, and Rogers was conscious of that

singular impression of having peeped in on a family difference. He believed that Byron had told Lady Caroline that he was to dine with him, Rogers, and that the lady, fearing that she would be deprived of her privilege of displaying herself alongside the poet at Mrs. Lambton's, had endeavoured to exact from him a promise to excuse himself from the dinner.

Perhaps, too, she had succeeded in getting such a promise from him. He thought that it was considered inevitable in the case of such a friendship as existed between Byron and Lady Caroline, that the poet should promise everything that he was asked to promise. Still, it was his impression that the lady had gone a little too far in accepting the duty of cancelling Byron's engagements.

And that was exactly what Byron thought. He felt that he had very nearly been made a fool of in the eyes of his best friends by Lady Caroline, and this feeling was linked closely to another—a feeling that it might be that his best friends thought Lady Caroline had long ago done this. Lady Melbourne, who was her husband's mother, had proved to him that this was her belief ; he could not expect that all his other friends should be as cordially frank as Lady Melbourne ; at any rate, they refrained from expressing any definite opinion within his hearing on this delicate point. But he had noticed the exchange of glances between Lord Holland and Sheridan at the supper table when Lady Caroline was making a move to assert herself. The very fact that Sheridan thought it well to bring his unrivalled powers of cajolery into play in order that he, Byron, should have a chance of slipping away without attracting her attention—just as a schoolboy would steal away from the schoolroom when the master has ordered him to stay to complete his task—this very incident was of itself something of a hint to him of how he appeared in the eyes of his friends. They had assumed that he was not altogether a free

agent ; that before he could take a step of even minor importance, Lady Caroline would consider herself entitled to say a word or two. He required to be treated as a schoolboy ; an adroit friend had out of his good-will covered his retreat by wheedling the lady. And, moreover, the fact of his friend's undertaking to wheedle the lady was rather more than a hint that he believed her to be a silly creature easy to be played upon by a man practised in the art of cajoling. That meant that he, Byron, had been fool enough to allow his name to be associated with that of a silly woman.

He had no difficulty whatever in imagining the comments of his friends upon this incident—the laughter of the men lolling in the chairs at the club—another story of Sheridan's cleverness, only it was not of Sheridan's managing to evade a pressing creditor by his plausible tongue, but of Sheridan's adroitness in enabling that poor devil Byron to escape from the silly woman who was supposed to have him in her clutches !

And now here was Rogers with his story of how she had endeavoured to prove to all the world that he was not his own master even to the extent of accepting an invitation to dine with his friends. A henpecked husband, that was his position, only that he was not the husband, only the friend—he was the henpecked friend—the good-natured house-dog, who, to wile away the time, had trotted round to the hen coops and found that the wire door had closed behind him, preventing his escape, so that he was pecked at and flapped at until he was forced to squeeze himself between the meshes of the wire-netting in order to get away when the hen was not looking.

He knew that it was the most good-natured of his friends who looked on him as the useful domestic dog of the family. The others—and these were in the majority—hinted at his character for wildness : he was not to be trusted in a house, the old wolf had not

yet been tamed out of him. It was understood that Madame de Staël took this view of his association with the Melbourne household. She gave a very witty version of La Fontaine's fable of "Le Loup et l'Agneau," to her circle at the salon of the Miss Barrys, the humour being that the lamb made the wolf her slave and taught him to eat grass and to be generally vegetarian in his habits, saying "baa" to every suggestion he ventured to make, until he felt humiliated in the eyes both of the sheep and the wolves. But the lamb, being a silly creature, trusted too much to the charm of her own society to keep down the wolf nature, for one day, when she had flung into the lake a savoury bone which the wolf was about to taste, he turned upon her and dined off lamb cutlets for several days in succession.

"The moral," said Madame de Staël—"the moral is that while a wolf is always a wolf, a lamb may be cooked in nine different ways, and platonic affection is the mayonnaise which makes cold lamb quite palatable."

He had heard a whisper about this fable. He had laughed at that time, but now he did not laugh recollecting it. He felt humiliated. He had flared over the town as the author of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." Thousands of people had flocked to the Park when it was known that he was riding there; thousands had gone to the theatre on the chance of catching a glimpse of him in a box; but now even his own friends were shrugging their shoulders at the mention of his name. Even Rogers had assumed that he had no choice but to go with Lady Caroline Lamb to a ball, although he had accepted his invitation to dinner.

He found his friend Lord Sligo waiting for him at his rooms. The two had not met since they had been for some time together in the East, and now they were both in high spirits at being in each other's company in town.

“ It makes me feel a man again,” cried Byron. “ Heaven ! The breath of the Bosphorus is on my cheek when I see you beside me. Oh, those nights aboard the boat ! Moonlight ! what moonlight ! The city of the mosque and minaret ! What would I not give to be able to look out of that window and see one of the minarets of that place of palms and myrtle, to hear the muezzins’ cry instead of the trundling of hackney coaches ! ”

“ You have saved thousands of our countrymen the need of going to the East : you have brought the East to them, my dear Byron,” said Lord Sligo. “ When I used to see you scribbling on the backs of letters, on the blank pages of books, on every scrap of paper you could get hold of, how little did I think that when brought together those scraps should become one of the greatest poems in the language ! ”

“ You knew as much about it as I did,” laughed Byron. “ I thought nothing of ‘ Childe Harold.’ It was to a satire, an imitation of Horace’s ‘ Art of Poetry,’ that I pinned my faith. I took trouble with it, but none with the other. I said to someone the other day that I awoke one morning and found myself famous. That was the exact truth. I thought nothing of ‘ Childe Harold,’ and I thought little of the judgment of Dallas and the rest of them who advised its publication. Never mind, the public took it. Let us talk about something else.”

“ Not until I ask you one question. Why did you not tell in the course of the ‘ Pilgrimage ’ the story of the girl at Athens whom you saved from death ? ” said Lord Sligo.

“ What do you know about that matter—you were not with us ? ” said Byron.

“ No ; but I heard something of it when I went to Athens a few days later,” replied the other.

“ Most likely what you heard was fiction. There was really not much in the occurrence. The Turkish

Governor had the girl sewn up in a sack, and as I was returning from a swim, meeting the procession with the sack on their way to deep water, I did a little braggadocio—flourishing a pistol and so forth—and prevented the rascals from carrying out the sack and their design. That is really all."

"But you bribed the Governor, did you not, and got him to rescind the sentence upon the girl?"

"Yes; that followed as a matter of course. The girl was sent off in safety to Thebes."

"That I heard too. I expected to find the story in full in the 'Pilgrimage,' and was greatly disappointed when I learned that you had omitted it."

"Oh, my dear Sligo, I had no mind to set myself up as the hero of my Oriental romance."

"You took good care to set out Childe Harold in anything but an heroic light; you might have given him a chance of recovering himself. I cannot understand why you refrained.—The story would make a fine romantic poem as it is."

Byron mused for some moments.

"Perhaps—who knows?—I might. No, no; I have made up my mind to write no more in this strain; and yet—well, I may see my way to scribble something after the style of Scott. But what are your plans? I heard that you intended going abroad again soon."

"In the course of a week or two. I would that you were to be of our party."

"I would that I had never returned. Within the past week I have been consumed with a longing to be among the islands once more. If you had asked me then I believe that I would have jumped at your offer."

"What! Does the errant Childe feel the fulness of satiety in the matter of fame? Or is it that there is one particular—"

"You will dine with me? I have not had a dinner for four days, and I did not mean to have one until

Friday, when I go to Rogers' ; but the sight of you has given me an appetite that is not to be controlled."

It so happened that Lord Sligo was without an engagement. Byron was not ; he was due at Melbourne House to accompany Lady Caroline to some entertainment at night. He ignored his obligation in this direction, however—he was only too glad of the opportunity afforded him by Lord Sligo's coming to see him—and they set out together for the quietest club where they might dine and have their chat, revolving many memories of their days in the East.

It was close upon midnight when Byron returned to his rooms. He went to the window of his sitting-room and opened it to the top. He was warm, and his brain was excited by the recollections which his night with Lord Sligo had brought back. He looked out upon the silent street, with the lamps faintly flickering into the distance, and he seemed to be looking down the Piræus upon one of those still nights which he had been recalling with his friend.

Lord Sligo had kept harping upon that adventure with the girl who had been saved from drowning. Byron had not thought much about it at the time ; but now, when the lapse of years had thrown about it a garment of mist through which its body gleamed—he was thinking of the girl when she stood forth in her light garments in the palace of the Governor—he was strangely attracted to it. Why had he not written before of that incident ? How had it been possible for him to neglect it for so long ? His imagination was now awake as it had not been for years. He saw the beautiful girl, he saw her lover, their meeting, their parting, their devotion. Scene after scene came before him ; scene crowded out scene, with the splashing of the blue waters, with the waving of the palms, with the sunlight among the clusters of the clambering grapes, the goats among the rocks, the convent white on the hillside—scene after scene.

And then, still standing at the window, he gasped. Who had told him the story of that girl and her lover as he had just seen it? When he had been at the table with Lord Sligo he knew no more of her story than he had learned when he interposed on her behalf; and yet now it seemed to him that he had known her story all his life. And the man—but he had never seen the man—the man was there, too, on horseback on the hill, with the sunlight laughing around him, gloom only on his face.

His imagination was alight. He flung himself into a chair, just as he had done on that first morning at Annesley Hall, and dipped his pen in the ink. Across the darkness of the night that the square of his window framed, there came a picture of sunlight and colour—transparent, crystalline, glowing. He saw it, and wrote—

Fair clime! where every season smiles
Benignant o'er those blessed isles,
Which, seen from far Colonna's height,
Make glad the heart that hails the sight,
And lend to loneliness delight.
There shine the bright abodes ye seek,
Like dimples upon ocean's cheek.
So smiling round the waters lave
Those Edens of the Eastern wave.
Or if at times the transient breeze
Break the smooth crystal of the seas,
Or break one blossom from the trees,
How grateful is the gentle air
That wakes and wafts the fragrance there.

He remained writing hour after hour, throwing sheet after sheet on the carpet. His candles burnt down to their sockets, the early dawn hung a curtain of dove-grey across his window, a ray of sunshine found its way between the houses across the street, and fell upon his table like the scimitar of the Giaour of whom he had written; the early sounds of the street began, the early sounds of the house, and still

he went on ; sheet after sheet of paper was covered with those wild verses in which he depicted, as no poet had done before, as no poet has done since, the romance—the passions of the East, the mystery, the blaze of sunshine, the bursts of gloom—warm, lurid fragments—a story told by suggestion—a nightingale's song mingling with the ringing of the vesper bell in the monastery on the hill that Homer had known. That is “The Giaour.”

The morning was far advanced before the pen fell from his fingers, and it was almost noon before he fell asleep on his bed.

CHAPTER XII

HE did not leave the house all that day, but he did not add a line to the fragments which he gathered up from the carpet of his room and put away in his desk. He laughed as he thought of that curious frenzy which had taken possession of him under the influence of the memories brought back to him by the night spent with the friend who had travelled with him for some days. He thought of what Lady Melbourne had said to him: that the decision to which he had come respecting his writing was a vain one; that a poet's work was not in his own hands. Miss Milbanke had said something also to the same effect. He wondered how these women knew.

But they did know, while he remained in ignorance, believing that it was in his power to write when he pleased and to abandon writing when he made a resolution to do so. But he was conscious of a feeling of satisfaction when he reflected that he had at least been able to keep the promise which he had made to Miss Milbanke. He knew that he had written no line in the strain which pervaded "*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*."

He continued thinking about Miss Milbanke for some time, contrasting her pretty earnestness in talking to him, both at Melbourne House and at the Hollands' reception, with the habitual artificiality of her cousin. It was because he had been impressed by her earnestness in hoping to bring about his reformation—her earnestness without that strident quality of which

he had had experience, for other young women had attempted to reform him—that he had made up his mind to prevent Caroline from turning upon her at Holland House. He was glad that he had succeeded. He had not yet met a girl in London who seemed to him to possess such agreeable qualities as this little Miss Milbanke—Belle Milbanke, her friends called her. He felt that he was better even for the thinking about her; and so he continued thinking about her, in order that her object should be the nearer to accomplishment: in time she might be able to pronounce his reformation completed, and surely the process was one that he should account the simplest as well as the most agreeable.

He got a letter from Lady Caroline the same evening, in which she reproached him with vehemence for having failed her the day before. He had tired of her—she could not doubt, she said, that he had tired of her. Or had Miss Prudence Prim poisoned his mind against her? Miss Prim, she could assure him, had a tongue that jealousy never failed to loosen. Her family knew this well, having had experience of her. She wore the colours of the dove, and thus the unsuspecting could scarcely be brought to believe that her nature was more akin to that of the mischievous magpie or the chattering chough.

Byron laughed when he came to this passage. The rest of the letter was one hysterical outburst on the possibility which occurred to her of his being ill and unable to leave his rooms. If so, he had only to send her a message and she would hurry to his side—she would be his nurse—she would bring her Byron back to health, or else die with him; for what would life be worth to her?—and so forth.

“But you will come to me to-morrow and relieve the suspense of your Caroline,” she added on the last page. “Come to me; for I have something of infinite importance to both of us—nay, to all the world—

to whisper in your ear. Our names are to be associated in a way that will cause the envious to be still more envious, and the spiteful to be still more malicious. But the occasion will be so stupendous, and the triumph so huge, that every voice of detraction shall be hushed.

"Come to me, my Childe Harold, and I shall whisper everything in thine ear."

He laughed at these mysterious suggestions. He made up his mind that he would never give her the chance of whispering anything into his ear. Her secret, if it existed at all, would remain hidden for ever if it could only be revealed to him in a whisper.

He felt less afraid of her now than he had felt before. He had been thinking of Belle Milbanke and the *Ægean*. Somehow in his mind the two seemed to be connected—seemed to convey to him the one impression, and that was of a gracious calm retreat, where he should be safe from the fury of the tempest, safe out of hearing of the rude noise of the world.

He had scarcely finished reading the letter when his man announced Lady Melbourne. In spite of his accession of courage he found himself glancing with some trepidation at the door after her ladyship had entered. He was relieved to find that she came alone; and he greeted her all the more warmly on this account.

But she was an acute observer; she had seen his glance and she knew exactly what it meant.

"Oh yes, my dear Byron, I am quite alone," she said. "No one suspects that I am here."

"You are not the less welcome, my dear lady," said Byron. "I am sure that you will believe that, although you have not seen me for some days."

"I am so glad that we have not seen you for some days—you will not accuse me of a want of hospitality for saying so," she said. "I have noticed with feelings of the greatest satisfaction that you have been neglecting us."

He laughed so easily that his uneasiness was at once apparent.

“The truth is, Lady Melbourne, that—that—well, my friend Sligo came to me, and I was carried away by the memories of the old days—we were together in the East, you know,” he said, beginning very glibly, but being a good deal less fluent toward the close of his excuse for excusing himself.

“I do not flatter myself that anything I said to you a few days ago would influence you immediately, but I am sure that you feel that I did not speak at random,” said Lady Melbourne.

“You spoke truly—faithfully—honestly, and it is impossible that I should ever forget your words,” he said, taking her hand and kissing it.

“I am very glad that such is your feeling,” she said. “I have been thinking a great deal about you and your future since we had our little chat together ; I have been thinking most of what you said regarding the longing you had for a home—the home that you have never known ; the result of my thinking over the matter was that I asked myself the question, ‘Why should Byron not start a home of his own, and subject himself to its sweet influences, instead of being dependent upon such glimpses of the domesticity which he loves, through other people’s doors ?’ Seeing only the homes of strangers is as unsatisfactory as looking at happiness through another’s eyes.”

“I follow you—I agree with you,” said Byron. “Please go on—tell me that you have found someone—that is not a home which has only a man at the head of it.”

“Of course it is not. As to the—the important ‘someone,’ I am not so ready to speak. I am no believer in match-making. I have seen as much of life as convinces me that a maker of matches is frequently a maker of mischief. At the same time I believe that it is in a woman’s power sometimes to turn

a man's thoughts in a right direction—the direction in which happiness—not *his* happiness merely—not *her* happiness merely, but happiness—their happiness, may be found."

"I am sure of it. After all, marriage is to be happy, but in the potential mood—it is happiness that may be."

"Quite so. Anyone that talks about certain happiness is one who knows little of life. Now the young woman whose name I would venture to whisper in your ear is Belle Milbanke, my niece. What, you are not overwhelmed with surprise? Is it possible that—"

"I have been thinking more of her during the past few days than I have ever thought about a girl in all my life. She charmed me when she came to lecture me at Melbourne House. I was only sorry that—"

"That Caroline should behave like a fool upon that occasion? That is what you think; but it was really of no consequence. Belle knows Caroline too well to be surprised at anything she may do. But let me tell you that she felt surprised upon that occasion. You it was who surprised her. She has always been a girl who has taken the serious things of life seriously; about the less important matters she has been pretty much as other girls."

"She came to the conclusion that I was one of the serious things?"

"That was why she set out to lecture you. She has a sense of duty."

"I knew from the first that she was different from most other girls. Well, she lectured me and she prevailed."

"That is why she was surprised. She quite expected that you would be tough—very tough, if you condescended to listen to her at all. She was convinced that she would have to stand against a battery of your sarcasm, and yet so strongly she felt that it

was her duty to endeavour to lead you into the right path, she braved all—even Caroline—to go into your presence to convert you as Mr. Wesley did the miners. She came back to the drawing-room breathless with surprise and delight. And then you had a long talk with her at the Hollands'! Now, all I wish to say to you at this time is that Belle Milbanke is a thoroughly good girl, of good family, and with a good mind, and that she is greatly impressed by you. To say anything more would be to compromise myself as a match-maker."

" You need only have said one thing to encourage me, if you meant to encourage me, and that is that Miss Milbanke is Lady Melbourne's niece," said Byron. " There is no man living who would not be more impressed by a knowledge of that relationship than by any other fact regarding a young lady. I tell you frankly that I have been thinking of Miss Milbanke since I met her, and that the more I think of her the better I like her. But I am not at all sure that her thinking about me would have the same tendency. I have an intuition that she still thinks me a fearful reprobate, if not an actual atheist."

" That may be," acquiesced Lady Melbourne cheerfully. " But if you believe that any girl ever saved herself from falling in love with a man because she knew he had been even a reprobate—which, by the way, you never were—or an atheist—which you could not be, however greatly you might wish to be—you make a mistake that a little experience of life and young women should correct. The reform of the profligate is the secret ambition of every young woman who has serious notions. Now, I have nothing further to say on the subject. All that I meant by coming to you at this time was to lead you to think about Belle Milbanke, and it appears that there was no need for me to come to you for this. Thus, you see, I hasten to relieve myself of any responsibility

in this matter. The conclusion is with Heaven, where, as we are told, marriages are made."

She went away immediately. Byron made no attempt to detain her, because he saw that she did not wish to say another word beyond that which she had said to him at parting. She was a woman who knew exactly how much to say—yes, to a word; and of this fact he was well aware. She could convey an exact shade of meaning by her words, simply because she knew when to stop.

She left Byron sitting thoughtfully in his chair. But after an hour's thoughtfulness he had advanced no farther than he had reached before, when he had found that, in dreaming of Belle Milbanke and that peaceful "Eden of the Eastern wave," his thoughts had not strayed from the subject which he had been considering for some time.

It was on the evening following that he dined with Rogers at his house, the windows of which looked out upon Green Park. Moore and Sheridan were his fellow-guests, and as Byron was giving himself a day or two of freedom in the matter of regimen, no longer confining himself to biscuits and soda-water, the evening was a merry one. Byron and Moore joked after the manner of irresponsible schoolboys, the former being in particularly high spirits. Sheridan, too, was at his best, telling anecdote after anecdote, from his own experience, from incidents on the night of the first performance of *The School for Scandal*, when he had been so overcome with delight that he was apprehended in the street, and locked up by the watch until the morning, down to his little accident of the previous week when, on being found in difficulties by the same authority, and his name being demanded, he had said "Wilberforce." Sheridan was an inexhaustible storehouse of memories, and when his memory failed him his imagination came to his rescue,

so that no story of his ever lacked a legitimate and witty conclusion. He was the most conscientious of raconteurs, placing the entertainment of his hearers before all considerations of accuracy.

It was rather annoying that his story of the Regent and his jockey should be interrupted by the sounds of an altercation just outside the windows of the dining-room, in Green Park. There was the noise of female voices, speaking together, but not in unison—shrill—clamant—strident—denunciatory.

“I cannot hope to compete with that entertainment,” said Sheridan. “Friend Rogers, you should make your serenaders sing more piano. But all vocalists are, I know, apt to get out of hand.”

Moore swore under his breath at the interruption, and Rogers, after waiting for a moment in the hope that the altercation would drift away across the Park, went to one of the windows and threw it open, his intention being to instruct the watchman to send the belligerents farther afield.

The instant he opened the window, one at least of the voices became audible to his party. The lisp of Lady Caroline Lamb, even when her voice was pitched in a high key, was unmistakable. The less ardent voice Byron knew to belong to another lady, well known in ministerial circles, from whom he had received some letters expressive of her admiration for his genius. He had visited her, but not for some months. There stood the two women, face to face, the greasy light from one of the lamps of the Park flickering over their faces and finding a marvellous response in the diamonds of their hair—there they stood clamouring at one another like two fishwives, although their carriages and footmen were only a short distance away in the thoroughfare and the crowd of a London street at midnight had begun to collect about them, offering a word of encouragement to them every now and again.

Only a few seconds had elapsed when the window was opened before the *casus belli* was revealed by the threats on the one hand, the defence on the other, with hints, by no means darkly veiled, of frustrated guilt.

“I know that you look for his coming forth ; you believe that you have him as firmly in your claws as you had poor—”

“ ’Tis not my carriage that has been stopping the way for the past hour, madam ; take my advice and give your unfortunate husband—”

“Contemptible hussy ! if I want to know the direct path to perdition, I will come to you for advice, but until then—”

“That is the only path on which you have kept straight—that is Lord Byron’s judgment, not mine. I had it from him last week.”

“ ’Tis no wonder that he talks to me of your ladyship as an overripe medlar if you shriek out his confidences through the Parks. ’Twould suit your age better if you were to—”

The voices crashed together in mid-air and broke into shrill fragments, whereupon the crowd cheered and jeered.

“Two of Lord Byron’s admirers—privateers with all sail set—silk and muslin and pennons flying—have met in trying to meet him and convoy him to some of their routs. They are firing broadsides—red-hot like his lordship’s poetry,” was the explanation that an elderly naval man gave to someone who made an inquiry in passing as to the origin of the altercation.

Every word reached the ears of all within Rogers’ dining-room, until hurried steps were heard in the street, and there was a cry of “The watch—the watch at last !” The crowd broke ; the watch remonstrated ; the voices—still vituperative—dwindled away in the direction of the carriages.

Sheridan was too wise to make the attempt to conclude his story that had been interrupted so rudely.

He began another, although he knew perfectly well that the depression which had crept over the party from the misty park outside was not such as could be dispelled by his wit. He was anxious, however, to do his best for Rogers as well as Byron. His fresh story was like a lamp newly lit in a mist. It illuminated without dispelling the vapour.

Byron alone of the little party laughed boisterously at the point of the narrative. For the next hour he talked almost incessantly, and never more wittily. He might have been successful in placing all the party at their ease, if everyone had not felt that he was making a great effort to appear at his. His merriment was more depressing than his silence would have been. When Sheridan rose at last and said that he had an engagement for the morning which it was necessary for him, departing from his usual custom, to keep, so that he was forced to leave the table, everyone felt relieved, though they all knew with what a pang it was that Sheridan forsook the superb claret of Rogers' table.

Byron and Moore drove off together in silence, and it was not until the carriage was at St. James's Street that the former said—

“This is the last of our roystering together, my friend—at least, for some time.”

“I need not ask you when you made up your mind to this,” said Moore in a low voice.

“You need not. You heard the way my name was tossed into the gutter. You heard the yell of laughter that came from the scum of the street when my name was mentioned. I do not care to run the chance of a repetition of that scene. The truth is that I have been—but I need not confess to you; numbers of our friends have confided in you their unalterable belief in my faculty for folly, and now, I admit that I have been what they said I was—a fool with no redeeming feature for my folly. But it is over.”

“ Whither are you going ? ”

“ Heavens knows, and perhaps another power—one of equal potency, I am beginning to think. But I shall leave London, and, possibly, England.”

“ At any rate, you will keep me informed as to your movements, and I may be able to give you some of the gossip of the town.”

“ I don’t greatly care to hear anything. I feel just now that I have had enough of the town to last me for some time. Here we are at my door. My benediction go with thee, Thomas the Rhymer. ‘ When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice.’ ”

“ You may trust to me. I shall have nothing to relate. There will be a good deal of talk—chatter—women especially.”

“ I shall not hear it. Good-bye to you.”

They shook hands and parted without another word. Byron entered his sitting-room and lit the candles on his writing-table. Without a pause, and acting deliberately, he took paper from his desk and wrote a letter to Miss Milbanke, proposing marriage to her in the most conventional way, and devoid of any lover-like pleading. He addressed the letter and put it into his postbag to be delivered in the morning.

He felt a great relief at having taken this step. It was as if he had built a wall between himself and disaster.

The next day Lady Caroline Lamb’s carriage stopped at his door, and her ladyship, on finding the doors of his rooms locked, and learning from the caretaker of the house that Lord Byron had gone away to foreign parts, failed to retain control over her feelings. She flung herself wildly against the locked doors, shrieking for her Byron to come back to her—upbraiding him in unmeasured terms for deserting his Caroline—his Will-o’-the-Wisp.

The footmen standing outside, exchanged glances.

Thomas winked, Charles put a gloved forefinger to his nose.

"She has her tantrums again," muttered the coachman.

The caretaker offered to find her ladyship a cordial.

PART THE THIRD

CHAPTER I

ALL the sweet sounds of the spring landscape floated about the man who sat bareheaded in the travelling chaise, which seemed to cleave its way through the waves of a sea of scent as his felucca with its sail set had cleft its course through the ripples of the *Ægean*. He had all the delight of a traveller being borne through new scenes—all the joy of a traveller who, after long wandering through a barren land, comes suddenly into the very midst of a place of verdure, of waving grass underfoot, and the tenderness of half-opened buds overhead. The beautiful English landscape closed its arms upon him, clasping him in a mother's embrace.

There had been a shower in the early May morning, and the sunshine had been so fitful that the roads were not quite dry ; here and there a pool of water was glistening ; and every pool was a mirror to the faint blue of the sky ; he saw its sheen as the chaise swept past ; and the thrush and the blackbird whose flight had been disturbed, fled, uttering a note before they disappeared into the emerald tracery of the hedgerow. The rapture of a lark's song shivered and quivered from the sky ; and when one song dwindled away in the distance, another began a short way ahead, waxing louder and louder as the chaise went on, and then waning into a sweet thinness. A musical chain of song was being woven in the air above

those lovely slopes, and no link was broken by silence.

“That strain again,” said the poet—

“That strain again! It had a dying fall.
Oh, it came o'er my soul like the sweet air
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odours.”

There was an unbroken chain of sweet sounds that seemed nearer the heaven than the earth and there was an unbroken chain of sweet scents that seemed swinging in the tender air, just above the surface of the grass.

The white butterflies danced above the wild flowers of the lanes; the small bees went in zigzag curves from one cluster of shy bluebells into the luscious depths of the foxgloves and Canterbury bells, sipping sweets and swinging, ringing a fairy chime that only the poet's ear could hear. And then came the pink of an almond tree standing alone at the side of a cottage, and the white of a hawthorn—a billowy snowdrift suspended in the air, or else a fleecy cloud under the blue sky. The green pastures were full of fleeces, the young lambs trotting weak-kneed up to the ewes and turning to gaze with them at the chaise. Beside the little stream the large cattle lay lazily chewing the cud. The broad green of the pasturage spread side by side with the rich brown of the ploughed fields, not flat, but sweeping up the gentle slope, the furrows like the waves of an even sea, that only broke along the ridge of the hill in a fringe of foam where the white clouds had drifted and curled away from the sun. But all the clouds of the sky were not there; now and again a shadow would sail across green meadowland and brown field, sweeping over the ploughing teams, and the solitary figures of the sowers with the swinging hands, on to the swinging arms of the windmill. From the copse where a lane joined the high road came the notes of a cuckoo.

Byron lay back upon the cushions of his chaise tasting of the sweetness of the English spring. Nothing of the charm of the soft tints of the gracious time—of the notes of the birds—of the perfume that saturated the air, was lost upon him, and he felt himself to be a part of that spirit of the spring which was passing over the land, leaving flowers where its unsandalled feet had touched the earth and opening the blossoms that it breathed upon. He felt all the calm delight of the hour, and he was glad that he had not carried out his intention of going to the East, but had spent the months of his absence from London in the West of England. He had been a welcome guest at the houses of many friends, and he scarcely felt even mortified to receive a letter from Miss Milbanke rejecting, for the present, his offer of marriage, but expressing the hope that she might be permitted to exchange letters with him from time to time. In the course of the next few months he came to hear that she had refused two other proposals made to her by men, each of whom was a much more eligible suitor than himself.

And then the poem which he had begun to write on the evening he had spent in the company of Lord Sligo, was published, and the success of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" was repeated in "The Giaour," only more abundantly. Edition after edition was called for, and with the issue of each came further pages of magical poetry that entranced all England with their melody.

Of course, he received many letters from the woman from whom he had fled—letters reproachful, full of fiery denunciation, and then melting into wild tears on every page and all ending with the cry, "Come back—come back!" When Drury Lane was opened and his address was spoken on the stage, she clamoured "Perfidious!" "False wretch!" She knew, she declared, that it was he, and he only who had prevented

her from being the one to speak the address ; Mr. Sheridan had given her his promise that hers was to be the first voice heard by playgoers on the new stage, and had Mr. Sheridan ever been known to break an engagement ? No, it was the man whom she had trusted so fondly that had been false to her. It would be in vain for him to deny it.

Byron made no attempt either to acknowledge it or to deny it. He laughed, somewhat grimly, at the thought of the possible interview which she would have with Mr. Sheridan. But he was not uneasy for Mr. Sheridan. He had every confidence in that gentleman's ability to extricate himself from any position in which he might find himself through having been too prodigal of his promises.

He replied to one of her letters only ; but he did it in such a spirit as would, he feared, not commend itself unreservedly to Lady Caroline. It was the letter of the good friend—the most unappetising type of communication possible to be received by a correspondent who rhapsodised of passion. Worst of all, he told her that his whereabouts would be for some time so uncertain that he had instructed his caretaker to send all his letters to Mr. John Murray, of Albemarle Street, who would open them and reply to such as needed an immediate answer.

Still she showered her letters upon him, and he was forced to confess that she reached a very high level as an exponent of the aggrieved reproachful style of composition in the communication which she sent to him on the publication of "The Giaour." The poem was not dedicated to her—that was her plaint. Surely her friendship for him demanded so simple an acknowledgment ; but it was not yet too late ; a second edition was, she understood, likely to be called for, and she would be satisfied if this

supplied an omission for which, possibly, a printer's carelessness was responsible.

Her next letter was in quite another strain.

"I am writing a novel," she wrote, "and though my name does not appear in the dedication of 'The Giaour,' you may be sure that I shall take care that the identity of my *hero* will be disclosed on every page. It will be the portrait of a *monster* not a *man*, and my readers shall know that there is only one such, thank Heaven, in England."

She kept her threat, but when her novel of *Glenarvon* was published he was far away from England.

But even the recollection of her threat did not mar the feeling of gladness which awoke within him as his chaise passed through the entrance gates at Newstead on that bright spring day, and the vast mass of the old Priory was reflected in the lake before his eyes.

It was his own. That was his first thought ; it was not one of pride. He was lord of a magnificent ruin. He was returning to a desolated abbey, when his heart was full of hungering for a home. The gladness which had come to him from driving through the green landscape vanished. He had never felt lonelier in all his life than he did when the great mouldering gable of Newstead came before his eyes. He had won for himself by his genius a position such as had never before been attained by a writer of his years ; his name was on the lips of every man and woman of note in the kingdom, and there he was looking up at the ruin and feeling as if some satirical demon had summoned him to see a monument that was standing to his fame—an imposing pile of ruins.

All that he wanted for his own comfort was a couple of rooms in a cottage, and yet here he was, doomed to the splendid inconveniences of a glorious memorial of the transitory. It seemed as if all the cynical demons that have undertaken the education of man

had been planning this masterpiece of construction ; this entrance of the most distinguished of living men into his heritage.

The place would have been a silent solitude if it had not been for the birds which gave the ivy forest of the front the appearance of being a living, moving thing. There was not an ivy leaf that was not in motion with the birds leaving or returning to their nests. One continuous ripple of life ran across the ivy—one continuous twitter rippled from the eaves to the basement. No servants were in sight. Not a human being was to be seen in the grounds or on the banks of the lake. Lord Byron's personal servants, who followed him in a second chaise, had to ring the hall-door bell before the inheritor could obtain admission to his heritage.

The butler explained that he had not expected his lordship before the evening. Mr. Vince had certainly said that it would be the evening before his lordship could arrive.

Happily his lordship was not the ordinary man who looks for a well-cooked meal to be ready at whatever time he may choose to arrive home. Byron was content with the most meagre fare, and he would not partake of it for some hours. He left the grumbling by reason of the missing meal to be done by the servants who had travelled with him. And they did it. They had none of his lordship's foolish notions on the subject of a reasonable regimen. They never got on friendly terms with the house staff, beginning as they did with empty reproaches, and proceeding to complaints about the beef, and the choice of the beer. But what could be expected, they growled, of a household where his lordship would be contented with pickled cabbage and soda-water ?

In the afternoon Byron strolled away from the house to the lake where his eccentric predecessor had sailed his model frigates, and brought them into

action against each other with the discharge of real carronades. He had his pocket full of scraps of biscuit for the carp in the old stewpond of the monks; and it amused him to recognise among the fish some of his old friends—overgrown monsters, tame and impudent, scorning plain biscuits when they could get fragments of cake.

But when he had amused himself in this way for some time, and the carp, finding that they could get nothing more out of him, had forsaken his part of the pond—they showed, he thought, as much intelligence as if they were men—he seated himself on one of the stone steps of the bank and began to wonder what had brought him to Newstead—this house of loneliness—this magnificent dwelling-place that seemed to stand only to be a constant reminder to him that he had no home. He had been happy enough going from house to house during the winter and the spring, and he knew that he might have continued his roaming far into the summer, if he had made up his mind that London was to be closed to him. He remembered that he had been seized by a sudden longing to be alone—a passion for solitude which occasionally had taken possession of him since his Harrow days.

It was in the strength of this yearning that he had come back to Newstead, and he had felt that he was doing well, all the time that the journey occupied. He had not felt lonely for a moment. The pageant of early summer was ever before his eyes. He thought of those days of the season as of an exquisite maiden—the maiden of the spring was in the act of looking with wide blue eyes at all things of the earth, becoming vaguely conscious of the womanhood of summer which was beginning to make her heart beat faster. The passionate heart of summer had begun to beat in the maiden bosom of spring, and she was still rapt in the wonder of the change. The poet had seen the shy face peeping out from the

buds of the trees, from the blossoms of the hedge-rows—he had seen her flying feet among the primroses, and he had caught a glimpse of her flying hair when the sunlight had brought out all the sweet scents of the leafage of a lane down which he had driven one warm afternoon.

The poet knew that this masque of Nature which was played hourly before his eyes, with the choruses chanted in the woodlands, was the noblest poem that ever made the world rejoice. He rejoiced to witness it; it was only when he had come to the end of his journey that he felt the loneliness of being alone. He had forgotten that he himself was a part of the season—that he himself was a part of the pageant that was being played in Nature—the pageant which is Nature itself.

He lay back with his hands clasped beneath his head, looking up to the sky, and his thoughts went back to the morning when he had lain down on the roadside in the dawn with his eyes turned to the heaven, and had awakened to look into the face of Mary Chaworth. It was part of Nature's trickery for making everything dissatisfied with loneliness at this season, that he should think of Mary Chaworth. But he did not find that his loneliness was dispersed by his thoughts of her; for his imagination led him to paint a picture of Newstead with Mary Chaworth waiting at the entrance to welcome him on his return to the place.

That was what Newstead wanted to transform the dreariness of its ruin into a home. What Fate was it that had prevented his meeting her until it was too late? Whatever Fate it was he still felt as he had felt for years, that it was the most evil accident of his life; he knew that it had influenced all his life—almost every act of his life.

His affection for Mary Chaworth had long ago become, he thought, nothing more than a certain

tender memory—a gracious, melancholy memory of youth. But he had never taken his pen in his hand to put on paper the music that flowed through his mind, without thinking of her—without feeling that it was she who had first taught him what it was to be a poet. It was not until he had looked up to the blue heaven of her eyes that the knowledge came to him of what was meant by that unsatisfied feeling of which he had been so frequently conscious. She had given him the key to that mystery.

But she had at the same instant unlocked for him the mystery of love—the impulse of the truest poetry. He had never loved since he had parted from Mary Chaworth. He felt that he had worshipped the light that came from the sun itself, and he could not bow his knee before an *ignis fatuus*. To be sure he had been diverted by many a will-o'-the-wisp before Lady Caroline Lamb came before him; but the prayer of the Commander-in-Chief to the King of Assyria was ever in his heart at such times. The shrine of Rimmon had its meretricious charms for him, but his heart was ever in the true Temple.

He had seen nothing of Mary during all the years that had passed; he had had no desire to see her. He was quite satisfied that his love for her had become the tender memory that it now was: a devotional memory not to be spoken of to any of his intimates.

He lay there for an hour with his hands clasped at the back of his head. He watched the sun creep round the wing of the Abbey, so that its rays struck the flat surface of the lake, quivering there like golden javelins flung against a target of bright steel; he watched a hare sitting quite contentedly among the grass at the side of the water, not noticing his presence; he heard the quick little splash of a fish taking a fly on the surface. The afternoon was warm. There was a slumberous sound of bees in the

air. He fell asleep without feeling sleepy, just as he had done on that morning long ago, when he had opened his eyes and seen the face of Mary Chaworth close to his.

And now when he opened his eyes he found himself looking into the face of Mary Chaworth, but it was the face which appears in the phantasm of a dream—the face of Mary Chaworth, but the face of a child as well. He quickly raised his head and straightened himself, gazing at this incomprehensible vision. The little girl with the face and the hair of Mary Chaworth stood there, only a few yards off, gazing at him with large eyes of wondering blue.

CHAPTER II

“ You are a miniature,” said the poet in a voice so low that she knew it was not meant to be answered by her. So she still gazed at him. She was not so lost in wonder as he was. “ You are the fairy spirit of a day of the past—the daintiest dream that ever came out of the Limbo of memory.”

For some minutes he failed to realise that he was fully awake; but suddenly the explanation came to him with a flash. He was unable to speak at first, so great was his emotion. He turned aside his head to recover himself. The little girl was moving away slowly and still keeping her eyes on him.

“ Do not go away without speaking to me,” he said, putting out a hand to her. She stopped, and after a critical scrutiny of him, she went and put her hand in his confidingly.

“ My name is Mary Musters Chaworth Musters,” she said. “ It used to be only Mary Musters Chaworth. When I say it all straight out now some people fancy that there are two of me they laugh at the two Musterses. It’s not funny to laugh at things that aren’t funny now is it? And I have a doll that undresses and its name is Princess Charlotte have you ever seen the Princess Charlotte the real one and I have a rabbit that jumps and mamma is never cross as papa is I love my mamma and I love my papa because she told me that I must and so I do though I really hate him and what’s your name and have you

any little girls and do you buy them dolls naked or with clothes ? ”

She went on without a stop, pronouncing her words with the sweetest little lisp, and, of course, ignoring the *th* in favour of a *d*. She called “without” *midout*, and “naked” she pronounced *maked*. She was not at all breathless after she had spoken at such length, and on topics covering such an extent of ground. She stood looking into his face with serious eyes.

He held her hand in both his own. Her features were those of Mary Chaworth as he had known her ; the child had the same frank, blue-grey eyes, the same forehead over which the ringlets, as of silk threads, with the light shining upon them, rioted. She was Mary’s child ; and even while he gazed at her, the grave expression upon her face passed away in a smile. That was exactly how Mary Chaworth’s mood had changed at times—he remembered it well.

He could not speak for some time. The flood of gracious memories that came upon him overwhelmed him. He could only smooth the little hand—even that, he noticed, was the shape of Mary’s hand—smiling out of the sadness of his thought.

The child did not resent his silence. She looked at him as if she understood how it was with him—gentleness—compassion, her face expressed both, he thought ; she had something of the intuition of her mother.

“ You are Mary Chaworth,” he said.

“ Mary Musters Chaworth Musters *now*,” said the child, taking a long breath and saying the words in a gasp.

“ And do you think did we ever meet before, my Mary ? ” he asked.

* She looked at him with a little surprise. It was clear that she considered she had a good memory, and was reluctant that it should be found wanting.

She kept her eyes fixed upon his face for a few moments, and then she said decisively, shaking her head—

“No ; I never saw you in all my life.”

“Not in all your life, but don’t you think it possible that you were somewhere as a little angel’s soul, near me long ago—before your life began? That is what I think when I look at you, sweet Mary.”

He saw the puzzled look that came over her face. And he hastened to reassure her.

“You never heard anyone talk greater nonsense than that, did you now ?” he asked her.

“No ; I never did, indeed,” she assented warmly. “All the angels are in heaven.”

“Are they ?” he said.

“Yes ; and if we are good—very good, mind, we may go among them when we die,” said the child gravely.

“And do you think that you would like to go to them, Mary ?” he asked.

“I think ’twould be drefful,” she replied. “I should have to leave my mamma—I don’t want to go away from my mamma to be a angel but nurse says that heaven is lovely—just as nice as going to the seaside in the summer, and all the sand is gold, and the sea is silver, and the sea never goes out so we can paddle all day. Nurse said it was heavenly at the seaside, and I thought that the big white birds flying about were the angels, only they hadn’t harps. Mamma has a harp, it’s big, and only a very strong angel could fly about with it. Have you a harp ?”

He shook his head.

“I have what I sometimes call my lyre,” said he.

She lifted up a finger to him.

“You must never say that word it’s a naughty one,” she whispered. “If you say it you will get hurt. Tommy, who is in the stables and combs my pony’s tail, came to the cook one day and asked for a

bit of raw beef. His eye was shut dreffully, and it looked as if a little mouse was lying down on it. Cook laughed, and so did Becky, and Deborah, and Rawdons, who cleans the boots. They all looked at his eye and everybody wanted to know how he had got it so drefful, and he said that he had said that word to Johnson, the coachman's son, and he had got him a leftander on the peeper. I asked nurse what a leftander was, and what a peeper was, and she said it was stable talk and not fit for young ladies I'm a young lady."

"I will never say that word again," said Byron.

"What word?"

"The word that got Tommy a leftander on the peeper. I shouldn't like such a thing to happen to me."

"If you are good, nothing will happen to you. You must always do what you are told until you are grown up."

"And after that?"

"Oh, you may do as you please. Did you do what you were told when you were a little boy?"

"Not always, I'm afraid. I did not begin to do it until I was grown up."

"Did you get beaten with a cane or with a whip?"

"Sometimes with one, sometimes with the other—whichever was handier at the moment."

"Miss Sims uses a newspaper folded up she's our governess. Did you ever have a newspaper used against you?"

"Indeed, I have; scarcely a day passes without a newspaper beating me, my dear."

"Hard?"

"Very hard."

"It's all to make you good. I s'pose you are very bad."

"What do you think about it yourself, my Mary?"

"About what?"

"About my badness. Do you think that I am bad?"

"You look good; but Miss Sims says that sometimes the best-looking gentlemen are the worstest. Papa said Miss Sims was an old maid, but good enough for teaching brats Miss Sims was angry, and said if she was an old maid, it was her own fault. I did not know that she had any faults before then but she cried in the schoolroom when we were making toffee that evening. I asked her if she was crying for her faults, and she stopped crying so that she might be angry. The toffee got burnt do you like toffee?"

"Not exactly that sort, my dear. But I've found that always when I had prepared to enjoy a feast of toffee it tasted burnt the moment I got it near my lips, and left a bad taste in my mouth. I'm not a good toffee-maker."

"Did you rub the pan well with butter?"

"Alas, I'm afraid that I am one of those people who try to make toffee on a gridiron."

She was shocked, and took a step back from him in surprise.

"It would all go into the fire—all the sugar," she cried.

"And so it did—all the sugar went into the fire," said he.

"Did you cry?" she asked, in a low voice.

"I'm afraid that I did—through two volumes," he replied, smiling. "But I'm merry now since I met you, my Mary—my Mary—it makes me glad even to say your name—Mary—Mary. I should be always glad if I could always have your name on my lips. It is the only name that I ever knew which leaves a sweet taste in my mouth."

"You may say it all as often as you like"—she took her long breath—"Mary Musters Chaworth Musters. Maybe 'tis too long for you to learn. Do you still learn lessons?"

"I do, daily. I am learning one now."

"Where's your book? I have got as far as, 'The cow and the cat are fat'—'The man ran to the dog'—'The pig is in its bed.' " Suddenly she looked away from him and cried—

"Oh, here is mamma. She is looking for me, I know. Where is Mr. Vince? I came here with Mr. Vince."

He glanced round. Mary Chaworth, the mother, was standing among the trees, with a hand stretched out to the little girl who was running toward her, but her eyes were upon Byron.

He got upon his feet and shook back the curls that had fallen over his forehead. She came to him smiling, her child dancing round her, holding her hand—she was telling her mother of the funny man who tried to make toffee on a gridiron.

Thus it was they met after the lapse of years—both smiling, both silent. The child became silent too, looking up to her mother and then at him.

"I did not expect to see you here," she said. "Oh, Byron, what a long time you were in coming! But I am glad to see you once again. Seeing you looking so young makes me feel young once more. Oh, the long years! You belong to the world now, not to Newstead—not to us. But you have not forgotten that your lips were first unsealed among us. It was with us that you first learned the magic with which you have enchain'd the world."

"I can never forget it," he said. "I do not know if the world will remember anything that I have written so long as I remember the first song that came to me. It was you who picked up the chirping sparrow that was thrown out of its nest on the roadside, Mary. I was thinking of it only an hour ago."

"It was a forlorn little bird then—everyone thought that it was a sparrow; but I had a feeling that it was a nightingale—the sweetest that ever

sung in England," she cried. "I have read 'Childe Harold'—not always without tears, Byron. Happiness? The song of the Eastern bulbul to the rose—is that always a song of happiness? To be a poet is, I think, to be the interpreter of unhappiness."

"It was from you I got that word 'interpreter,'" he said. "That is the one word which I have always tried to remember. I wished to be an interpreter between man and man, between man and Nature."

"And that, I told you, is what it is to be a poet," she said.

"It is—it is; and if I could always remember that and forget myself I should be a poet," said he. "But when I read what I have written I feel humiliated; I feel that I have put myself into too great prominence. People have read 'Childe Harold' and believe that I was putting myself, and myself only, into the poem."

"They are fools!" she cried. "I read it and knew that you were not looking at everything you described, through a single pair of eyes, and those eyes your own. But the unhappiness—the pedal of unhappiness which you press down now and again, sending a note that mourns through stanza after stanza—that I fear is your own note—the unsatisfied cry of the dreamer of dreams. But the nobleness of it all—the love of freedom—the passionate war-cry in the ears of a world that loves better to sleep than anything else—that also is yourself, Byron. That is what I love—that trumpet-call of Liberty—I heard it, my dear Byron, and I thought of the promise which you made to me in the garden at Annesley Hall—I never sit on that stone bench without thinking that I am sitting there as I did that day when you promised me that you would ever be on the side of freedom—that you would ever lift up your voice on behalf of the oppressed against the oppressor. You have kept your word. You have

not forgotten the night when I sang about the Minstrel Boy?"

"Ah, that night—that night, Mary!"

"It was a wonderful night. I felt that you were indeed the Minstrel carrying both the harp and the sword—going out into the world—no true poet can face the world unless with a sword in his hand. He has to strike at all that keeps the world unbeautiful. You have struck well, my Minstrel, and you will strike more strongly still when you get to know your own power. You will—"

"Ah, do not let us talk any more about myself," said Byron. "I want to hear about you. You have been happy?"

"Yes, I have been happy," she said quietly.

"You say that in the tone of a woman who is reconciled to her unhappiness," said he.

She shook her head.

"I have two children," she said. "They mean nothing but happiness to me."

After only a short pause she laughed the laugh of the girl whom he had known at Annesley.

"I think that it is harder for a woman to be reconciled to her happiness than to her unhappiness," she cried. "There is a hard saying for you to interpret, Cousin Byron, the interpreter between man and man. I wonder if you have ever thought of woman as needing an interpreter sometimes—always?"

"Always—always," said Byron.

"Always? I think that you are right," said she musingly. "Up to the present man knows very little about woman. That is because she thinks in one language and talks in another; so her interpreters are baffled; they know only the language in which she speaks, and thus man gets no nearer to the real woman. But this is no time to talk philosophy to you, Cousin Byron. I wish to give you the welcome of affection, not of philosophy; and, indeed,

you are welcome. You have already made friends with Mary. You and she must have a long chat. We were trespassers on your ground. We have had an annual fête within the refectory of the old Priory, drinking our syllabub and cowslip wine on the friars' benches. It was Mr. Vince who took Mary away to feed the carp. Strange man that he is ! He never said a word about your coming, or I should, of course, have inquired for you at the house."

" I fell asleep, and when I awoke, I found myself looking up to Heaven, for the face of Mary Chaworth was bending over mine once again. How like the child is to you ! When I looked up and saw her face I thought for the moment that I was merely recalling that morning, so long ago, when you found me on the roadside. When she took a few steps from me, and I sat up, it seemed to me that by some miracle I had been borne back a dozen years even before that day, so that I was looking at you when you were a child."

" I believe that I was just such another chatterbox," said Mary. " I am sure she talked to you without ceasing."

" She told me a great deal," said Byron, and he saw that she gave a little start. " Her name, for instance. I was under the impression that Mr. Musters had taken your surname."

" So he did," said Mary ; " but he retained it only for a few years ; then he took his own surname again, so that now we are the Musters."

" May I revisit the old place—I suppose you are at Annesley just now ? " said Byron.

" Yes ; we are at Annesley just now." She paused for a moment before adding—

" It would be delightful to see you there once again. I do not think that there is any danger of a further menace from the picture. You have not forgotten how it fell from its panel ? "

"I have not forgotten how anxious you were for my safety," said he. "Do you remember the dream that you had of coming down the stairs and standing before it to pray that the crime of my predecessor might not be visited on my head?"

She flushed, and cried quickly—

"I do not remember telling you that I had such a dream. Why, it only happened the night before we—oh, if we begin recalling everything, where shall we end?"

"Ah, where indeed?" said he. "Especially if we begin to recall our dreams—I had my dream as well as you in those days, Mary."

She put out a hand to him; tears were in her eyes. But the moment that he touched it, she turned away her head. When he let her hand drop, she went away quickly, without a word—without even glancing at him. Her little girl, standing all this time on the lowest of the stone steps, flinging her crumbs into the pond and chatting familiarly to every fish that rose, rebuking some for their greediness, encouraging others, and shaking her finger at all of them for not saying "Thank you," on hearing her mother depart, ran up the steps and caught Byron by the arm.

"You must promise to come to see us we'll teach you how to make toffee in the right way we'll have great fun if you come one day when papa is not there. Good-bye."

He stooped and kissed her, and she ran away after her mother.

He watched them join the little party of children and nurses who appeared in the distance.

CHAPTER III

BYRON stood leaning against one of the carved stone vases, looking into the water, over the surface of which a swallow was circling. He watched it skimming the tiny ripples, then flashing high into the air, wheeling, with its wings suddenly checking its flight, and then swooping in an exquisite curve down to the surface once more. It was then that the lines were suggested to him—

Our thoughts like swallows skim the main,
And bear our spirits back again.

He had seen her again, and all the space of years that had elapsed was annihilated. He found that he was thinking of her now as he had thought of her long ago. It was as if he had been reading a poem, and had then laid the volume face down on his desk, but now he had returned to pick it up and resume the passage where he had left off. He had been able to do so from the very line that he had last read. And his continuation of his reading had left him in the same mood that had been his before—a mood of plaintively passionate rebellion against his destiny.

He remembered perfectly how he spent hours railing against the cruelty of the Fate that had built up a barrier between Mary and himself before they had known each other; and now his heart was full of the same feeling. He had been longing all his life for a home, and yet he was doomed to be a wanderer on the face of the earth. He had come back to his

inheritance only to find that he was as far as ever from a home.

As far as ever ? And how far was that ?

She had passed within half a dozen yards of the entrance to Newstead ; and it was just that narrow space that separated him from the happiness for which he had passed his life in longing. If she had entered the mansion at first his life would have been different from what it was. He thought of Mary Chaworth as his wife, of her child as his ; and there came before his eyes a picture of all the joyfulness of such a home. He had tasted of the world ; the world had given him of its best, but left him unsatisfied, because it had withheld from him the one thing for which his heart had been crying out. He knew that it is the strongest of a man's instincts to be the founder of a family and a home—to sit by his fireside with wife and children around him—he knew that the instinct has been transmitted from the very early ancestors of the human race—the cave dwellers who felt themselves secure when their fire was beside them ; and he knew that the striving after the happiness of a home is the worthiest that a man can have.

He had fallen short of its attainment by a hand's breadth—that was what was in his mind when he watched Mary Chaworth moving away from him. The voices of the children sounded through the evening air, and died away in the distance. He felt very lonely listening to them. They were not for him. The sound that was for him was that of the acclamation of the world for the greatest poet, and he thought nothing of that.

He turned away from the flaming iris flags that stood up among the broad floating leaves on the surface of the fishpond, and saw Vince standing beside one of the stone urns. The man was smiling in his own way, which Byron remembered but too well.

"You are here as usual," he said. "I suppose it was you who led the child to where I lay asleep?"

"You are right, my good lord," replied Vince. "I did not look for your arrival until much later in the day; but when I came upon you here I could not resist the temptation of seeing you awake under unaccustomed conditions. I led the child hither, and —yes, it was worth it."

"You were spying on us?" said Byron.

"Your lordship could not use a more appropriate word. I was spying, but from a polite distance. I suppose that I am the politest spy in the world."

"Why should you be a spy at all, my friend? Is it because you believe it to be the rôle in life which best suits your peculiar temperament?"

"It is with me a purely intellectual exercise, my Lord Byron. I am an intellectual investigator—not a material one. I like the work, and pursue it as a mental recreation, and without the hope of material gain. I am a sort of psychological chemist. I like to try experiments with the souls of men and women, dropping them into my crucible, blending them together upon occasions and seeing what comes of it, subjecting them to the lens of my microscope, noting their composition and frequently their decomposition. I assure you that I have made some curious discoveries."

"I cannot doubt it. Have you found that any of your amalgams has resulted in the philosopher's stone—a psychological philosopher's stone, Mr. Vince?"

"Your lordship suggests a mind that changes into gold everything that it touches?"

"Even so."

"Hitherto the result of my experiments has been in just the opposite direction. I have found that the majority of minds possess the property of turning precious things into base. But then, you must know that the sphere of my observation is so limited that

I have not yet had an opportunity of trying experiments upon a poet. Speaking as one of the cognoscenti, my lord, but at the same time frankly, do you believe that I should have any better results with a poet than I have had with the clay out of which ordinary souls are made ? ”

“ I think frankly that if you have been working in clay hitherto, you have not got very much nearer to the soul that you have been talking about.”

“ The tenement of clay—it was a poet who invented that phrase, was it not ? But, alas ! he knew less science even than the most successful of poets. The result of my experiments is to induce me to believe that the tenement is more spiritual than the spirit which is supposed to honour it by making it its place of residence. The man’s body would do good in the world if the man’s soul would only let it alone. The man’s body is a noble thing, it is the man’s soul that plays the very devil with it.”

Byron laughed.

“ Your philosophy is the wisdom of the devil, Mr. Vince,” he said. “ I wonder that you have been allowed to live among the simple people here. Properly speaking, you should have been stoned or burnt years ago. Your doctrines are grossly immoral. There must be no end to the mischief that you do with your hideous experiments. What is your object in life ? ”

“ To live, my lord—only to live,” laughed Vince. “ Perhaps I shall one day write the comedy of life.”

“ It will be an illuminating work—illuminated by the fires of the Bottomless Pit,” said Byron.

“ I should like to make Lord Byron my hero, as he is already the hero of the world,” said Vince.

“ I should like to see how you would treat me,” said Byron. “ I will say that you have lost no opportunity of observing me any time that you found me in your

neighbourhood. You went far the first time that we met."

"The most interesting night of my life," cried Vince. "It was one of the strangest nights ever known to the world. A night of marvellous meteors. I watched them for hours. I left off watching them to discover you—the meteor man of our new century. I should have known that you would be a meteor like the rest that I saw that night. How could you be otherwise? I was so interested in you that I uttered my thoughts aloud, and drove you to—what? Had you a presentiment of what was before you?"

"What do you mean? You insulted me and I left you. I knew nothing more than that."

"Like Saul, the son of Kish, who all unwittingly was led by asses to be made king. You were driven forth by my insolence, and now you find yourself monarch of the realm on which you entered a few hours after leaving me—the realm of the immortal—the realm of poesy?"

"Why do you put the inflection of a question to that vile phrase, man?"

"I wondered if you would be inclined to call the realm of poesy the one on which you entered, or the other immortal realm?"

"What other?"

"What other? Why, the realm of love, to be sure—that is the only realm of the immortals—the realm of immortal love."

"Keep your gibes for another subject, friend Vince."

"I will obey your lordship, but when I think of what you have achieved in the other realm I do not feel inclined to gibe. Lord Byron, you are a great poet, and I pity any man with all my heart who is compelled to be a great poet. A poet is born. That is one of the bitterest truths of life. He must have a father such as yours—a grandfather—a mother such as yours. Of such parentage is the great poet

born. He is a poet, but unconscious of his calling, because he has not yet heard the call to rise up and sing to the world. How does he hear the call? There is only one way—through suffering. It is when he looks around him and sees how desperately wrong is the whole ordering of the world, that the pains of his poethood come upon him and he hears the summons that he has no choice but to obey. You, Byron, the poet, know how you suffered. To be a poet is to have double an ordinary mortal's capacity for suffering. Your infancy, your boyhood, your manhood—suffering; and if Heaven has got a great enough grudge against you to compel you to produce some greater work than you have yet done, you will have to face more suffering."

Byron looked at the man in surprise. He had not expected so serious or so sincere an outburst from him. He had dropped his mocking note, speaking now with earnestness and with more than a preacher's confidence in the truth of what he had to say.

"Everything that you said is true, Mr. Vince," cried Byron. "It is only when Heaven has a particular grudge against a mortal that he is called to be a poet."

"The world honours him for being different from other men, and then reviles him for not being the same as other men," resumed Vince. "The temperament of the poet insists on his being a perpetual lover; but the world looks for him to be just the opposite—the respectable husband. The poet who is thwarted in his love becomes the greatest of all."

"That is his discipline of suffering," said Byron.

"We need not look for examples, you and I," said Vince. "Ah, my Lord Poet, I have never ceased to watch you since we first met, and you did me the honour to see a likeness in me, first to your father, and then to the devil. I watched you when that beautiful girl picked you up from the

ditch and brought you to her home. I knew what the result would be, though I confess that I did not dream of your being disciplined for a poet. I it was who led you to see that brilliant wedding procession. I watched you, and I knew that I had contributed to whatever end your discipline was leading you. That end was 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.' That poem has but two cantos up to the present. But it is unfinished. I am wondering what the new cantos will be."

"You are wondering if you could do anything more to further the ends of Fate," said Byron. "You are wondering if it would be in your power to weave an additional lash to the scourge which means the discipline of a poet."

"I am not so conceited as to arrogate to myself the office of a deputy Fate, my lord," said the man, still gravely. "I shall have enough to do looking on. Here are you, still loving the one woman of your heart, and here she appears, still loving you—"

"What do you mean, sir? What disordered imagination is this of yours?" cried Byron.

"Substitute observation for imagination and I will not object to your words," said Vince. "I suppose there is such a thing as a disorderly chemist's laboratory. And when it is a laboratory for souls, and every soul is a more potent medium of explosive mischief than gunpowder, and when the result of the amalgamation of any two of them may wreck a kingdom, can you wonder that a simple looker-on such as myself should occasionally be disordered?"

"Tell me what you have seen," said Byron suddenly.

"Saul and his witch," cried the other. "He called her a hag, and only missed burning her by a day or two, but he wished to know what it was that she saw. My Lord Poet, I need not tell you that she loved you long ago—you saw the look she cast at

you, boy and all as you were then, when she had not been a wife for half an hour ? ”

“ It meant nothing.”

“ But you knew that she loved you—you did not leave Annesley Hall at that time without learning that she loved you, although she was to marry the man who now ill-treats her.”

Byron clutched his arm as he cried—

“ That is not possible—he could never be such a monster ! ”

“ Do you really need to ask me such a question, after talking face to face with her for half an hour ? ” said Vince. “ Do not tell me that you did not see her story in her eyes. Do not tell me that you did not see her face as the face of a woman that has been very close to Sorrow—so close that her lips met the lips of Sorrow, and she said to Sorrow, ‘ Be thou my joy ’ ! ”

“ I saw it—I saw it,” said Byron in a low voice. “ I saw it, and said that it was the expression of one who was reconciled to grief. . . . But she has her children.”

“ And her religion. I had her missal in my hand one day, and I read the words which she had written on the blank pages. ‘ Lord, I know not what I should ask of Thee, Thou only knowest what I want, and Thou lovest me better than I can love myself. Give to me, Thy child, what is proper, whatsoever it may be, I dare not ask either crosses or comforts. I only present myself to Thee. Behold my wants, of which I am ignorant, but do Thou behold and do according to Thy mercy. Smite and heal, depress me and raise me up. I adore all Thy purposes without knowing them ; I am silent.’

“ These were the words that Mary Chaworth wrote in her book of prayers. It is because I committed those words to memory before I left the church where she had laid her book, that I tell you she has religion

as well as her children to support her in her worst hours. Now, there we have certain ingredients that go to the making of a pure soul of woman, and do you not fancy that the interest of watching their chemical changes when brought into contact with—well, with other ingredients of a totally different character, is absorbing ? ”

Byron was pacing the narrow ground that lay between the urns on the top of the stone steps. His head was bent. He did not seem to hear what the man had said—certainly not the latter sentences. At last he came to a standstill before Vince, and said—

“ There is ill-treatment and ill-treatment. What form does his take ? ”

“ That form which a woman, unless she has lost all sensibility, can least endure,” replied Vince.

“ She has a rival ? ”

“ Now and again—rarely the same during the summer that was a living force in the winter. The man, as you know, lived at Colbrook before his marriage. Then he came to Annesley, and later on he acquired another house. ‘ Thrift, Horatio, thrift ! ’ Why should a gentleman of ambition restrict himself when he has three fine houses to keep up ? He makes every house his home except the one that his wife inhabits. Three ! He would need a dozen, this Squire Musters.”

“ What ruffians men are ! ” said Byron.

“ We are, indeed,” acquiesced Vince. “ I prefer, you will observe, to accept the statement in its concrete rather than in its abstract form. I have noticed that when men talk of the wickedness of man they take it for granted that their hearers will not accept their statement as a confession. Nay, when a man shakes his head and complains of the wickedness of men, he has a pleasant sense of exceptional virtue, but in reality he is regretting that he has lost so many opportunities of participating in the wickedness

which he has attributed to others. Has your lordship had many chances of mourning over lost opportunities ? ”

“ He is not at Annesley just now ? ” said Byron, paying no attention to the man’s sneers—indeed, he was unconscious of them.

“ *He ? Who ?—the wicked man ?* ”

“ *Musters.* ”

“ *His wife is at Annesley. Are you answered ?* ”

“ You said that he was never to be found in the same house as his wife.”

“ ‘ To be found ’ ? Are you anxious to find him, or are you thinking of paying a visit of duty to your cousin—she is your cousin, even though half a dozen times removed ? ”

“ I do not know what I shall do—why should you assume that I intend to do anything ? ”

“ I made no such assumption ; it was your lordship who talked of finding Mr. Musters. To talk of finding is to talk of seeking, and—”

“ And to talk of seeking is to talk of foolishness, and to talk to Vince is to talk to a fool. Come, man, throw aside your affectation of cynicism—your double meanings—talk to a man like a friend—I have always treated you as a friend, in spite of your gibes and jeers and flaunts and sneers. You know as well as I do that when I asked if Musters was at Annesley, all that I had in my mind was the thought of her being beside him at this moment. Why should you always look at the worst possibilities rather than the best ? ”

Vince laughed quite pleasantly.

“ I look at the probabilities rather than the possibilities,” he said. “ The probabilities are all in favour of the worst, the possibilities are of the best, happening. In spite of statistics stored away in my memory, I am never despondent of the possibility of good happening ; even now, I feel that it is not beyond

the bounds of possibility that you will return to London to-morrow."

Byron was startled for the moment ; the conversation of this strange man usually contained some element of a detonating quality.

" Who was talking about my going back to London ? " said Byron. " Let me assure you that I have no intention of doing so."

" I knew you had no such intention ; your avowal of this adds to my statistics bearing upon the likelihood of the best happening rather than the worst," said Vince.

" Psha ! I am tired of you, friend Vince. You weary me. What kind of people do you consort with that you are alive to-day ? They are culpably good-natured ; you should have been run through the vitals long ago. Come up to dinner with me some evening."

" In order that the negligence of our neighbours may be redeemed ? " said Vince. " I feel honoured by your lordship's hospitable offer, but I prefer the simplicity of the Sybarite to be found within my own cottage to the ostentation of the uneatable which I understand is to be found on your lordship's dinner-table. I much prefer a dinner of herbs garnishing a well-cooked joint, to the stalled ox that stays in his stall while pickled gherkins are juicy with brine in the dining-room. The luxuries of the potato-pot are not for me, and the exhilarating imp that lurks in the soda-water bottle, shooting its cork up to the ceiling in its wild pranks, will never make me its victim."

" Do you suggest that I condemn my guests to the fare which I find suits myself, you rascal ? " cried Byron.

" I would not do so for the world," said Vince. " I was speaking in parables—assuming that your lordship was vinegar, and that my tastes were oleaginous.

I have the honour to wish my Lord Byron good-evening, and a bad appetite for dinner. I am sure that I could not wish you anything more congenial to your tastes and table. Good-evening. We shall meet again before long ; your lordship will begin to be lonely."

He took off his hat, making a mock obeisance, and strolled away, having escorted Byron to the door of the mansion.

CHAPTER IV

BYRON passed the rest of the evening, and far into the night, roaming through Newstead. Not more than a dozen rooms in the great mansion built within the ancient Priory had been furnished ; and when he had gone through them all he attacked the empty apartments, the greater number of which he had never before entered. He had no object in his exploration ; nor did he make any important discovery of missing wills or skeletons in cupboards. He was in a gloomy mood, and he found his employment a congenial one. Passing from room to room and from gloom to gloom, he arrived at last, carrying with him a small lighted lantern, at an apartment situated at the top of a flight of steps, which curved in the beginning of a spiral ascent off a lobby. The door was locked, but the frame felt so shaky when he pushed at it that he knew he had only to throw his weight against it to send the lock flying from the rotten wood.

He did not find it so easy as he had thought it would be to effect an entrance ; but after two or three attempts the screws in the lock yielded, and the door creaked open, admitting him to the musty smell of a dungeon. He threw the light of his lantern round the walls, and disclosed the enormous fungus growths of the plaster—grotesque splashes of curious colour—pinks and purples—greys and greens—some like bosses of moss, others resembling gigantic sponges, and hairy scalps hung up as ghastly trophies.

Plaster had fallen from the ceiling at some distant period, and a hillock of it lay on the seat of a chair. Another chair lay overturned on the floor, and a third leant up against a bookcase, on two legs. There was a writing-table in a corner, and papers were still on it, covered with dust. So dusty and musty a room he had never been in. The cobwebs were hanging from the broken ceiling and the framework of the window as tattered banners hang among the tombs of a cathedral.

An old coat lay in tatters on the floor beneath the peg from which it had dropped ; an old pistol wanting a lock was at his feet, and a flash of his lantern showed him the missing lock, with the flint-flake beside it, on the mantelshelf. It seemed as if someone had been interrupted in the act of repairing the pistol, and had never returned to complete his job. On another part of the mantelshelf there lay a bronze ornament—a figure of Time with his scythe, which looked as if it had fallen off an old timepiece. A quill pen lay beside it.

Byron picked up the figure in the tips of his fingers and examined it gingerly ; when in the act of laying it down he found that it had been used as a paper weight. The paper which it had covered made a gleam of white among the grime of the apartment, like a patch of snow on a newly ploughed field. He held his lantern to it, and found that it contained writing. Owing to its having been kept beneath the heavy paper weight, the calligraphy was clean, and he had no difficulty in reading the words—

With this sword I kill'd Mr. Chaworth of Annesley. Wou'd to God I had a chaunce of dooing it agen a curs'd rascall.
Byron.

'Twas about Jenny a slutt.

The sixth Lord Byron read the words which his predecessor had written doubtless many years before

—he had no means of knowing how many years before. He looked about for the sword to which the dainty inscription was to be attached—it did not show any sign of having ever been attached to the sword—but he failed to find the interesting weapon. He stood with the paper in his fingers, looking round the gloomy apartment. Dust, dust, moth, and rust, cobweb bannerets, fitting relics of the knight who had done his kinsman to death and then left a boastful record of his own crime to be read by his successor.

The good knight is dust,
And his sword is rust,
And his soul—

Byron laughed as he recalled the lines. His soul—the less that was thought about the ultimate destiny of the soul of the fifth Lord Byron the better chance his successor would have of hoping he was happy. If there was any justice or judgment in heaven or earth he could not be happy. But was it just that his descendants should bear the curse of his crimes ?

That was the question which the inheritor of Newstead asked himself. His imagination was strong enough to enable him to see by the fantastic illumination of the lantern—the light shot out through the square glasses, but it was broken by the iron work, which was consequently thrown on the walls in thick pillars of shadow, while the little dome of the roof filled nearly all the ceiling with gloom—the scene which he fancied had taken place in this very room. He remembered all that Mary had told him about the duel—it had been called a duel—between her ancestor and his grandfather's brother; and the features and figure of the painting hanging in the hall at Annesley were ever vividly before him. He saw Mr. Chaworth with his sword drawn there—there at the wall near the table, waiting for the attack of his crafty antagonist, who, knowing the room,

would have taken good care to keep his back to the light. . . .

It was all over in a few minutes. Mr. Chaworth was stabbed, and lying in a heap just where the coat that had fallen from the peg in the wall was lying—it might have been his coat that lay there. Byron fancied he could still see on the floor, in spite of the dust of years, the dark stain left where the man's life's blood had ebbed away. . . .

There was the sound of the scurrying of rats in the wainscot, and their shrill squeal about the hearth-stone ; the muffled hoot of the owls that had lived for perhaps hundreds of years in the ivy forest of the old Priory ; but at intervals there was a dead silence. He fancied that he could hear through these silences the gasping of the man who lay dying on his back on the floor. . . .

And was he—he, Byron, who had never so much as seen the man who had slain his kinsman in this room—was he the inheritor of the responsibility for this act as well as of the estate of his predecessor at Newstead ? Cradled in the superstition of his Scotch relatives, his vivid imagination added force to all the legends which had been told to him of the effects of “ curses ” passed on from generation to generation of certain families in the Highlands. Remembering as he did how narrowly he had escaped the fate of being overwhelmed by the falling picture at Annesley, he felt like a man who knows that he is followed by an inexorable Fate.

Was it not this Fate that had caused him to learn when standing at midnight before the picture of the murdered man, that Mary Chaworth, whom he loved, loved him—to live in a trance of delight, having heard her confession, only to be hurled into the depths of disappointment the next day ? Was it not this Fate that had brought him back to Newstead to find that he felt for Mary Chaworth now the same

love that had made his fool's paradise in the old days a real Eden? And to have it suggested to him that she—

He caught up his lantern and flung open the door of this haunted room, and he was conscious of feeling as one might fancy the good knight to feel who succeeded in freeing himself from the spell cast upon him by Morgan le Fay. He made up his mind that he would no longer be bound by these fantastic imaginings. They had come to him, he tried to make himself believe, through breathing the vile airs of the room which had not been opened for years, and inhaling, with the musty atmosphere, the morbid suggestions made by his imagination stimulated by the story which he had associated with the room.

He made up his mind to discard the hints which he had received from Vince respecting Mary Chaworth and her husband. He would show Vince and everyone else that he recognised the force of the existing fact that Mary Chaworth was a wife and a mother. He would not even admit to himself that he loved her still; but if now and again a thought of his affection came to him, he would show to everyone—even to himself—that his love was too true to be otherwise than disinterested—that his love was worship—true devotion offered to one whose nature could have no thought that was not pure.

With more than one heroic resolution he went to his bed, and lay awake railing against Fate that had condemned him to loneliness—that loneliness which must ever be his, living as he was, apart from Mary Chaworth. But when he awoke in the morning it was with a sense of having made certain resolutions to which he would adhere; his adherence to them was essential not only to his own happiness and self-respect, but also to hers.

And before he had finished his meagre breakfast he was considering his chances of being able to see

her this day. The beauty of the day had an additional charm imparted to it when he reflected that it was quite possible that he might meet Mary Chaworth before evening. He reflected that he had not had this thought since he had slept under her own roof: he had gone to his bed after his experience of her sleep-walking, thinking—

“I shall meet her when the morning comes.”

How many barren days of his life had passed since then—days when he had no prospect of seeing her? He marvelled greatly now how he had found it possible to face such days of barrenness—so profitless—so blank. But he would not deliberately ride out with the intention of meeting her. He would not go in any direction that she would be likely to take in driving or riding. He mounted his horse and rode out through the gates in exactly the opposite direction to the Annesley road. He returned after some hours, without having met anyone whom he knew. He was aware of a certain feeling of satisfaction when he reflected upon his self-restraint. It was as if he had seen Mary Chaworth standing in the sunlight beckoning to him—well, if not beckoning to him, at least awaiting his coming—and still he had gone in the opposite direction.

But when he had ridden out in this way every morning during the week—when he had changed his time for riding to the afternoon, without his self-restraint being rewarded by a glimpse of the lady whom he was trying to avoid, yet hoping to meet, he became greatly dissatisfied with his luck. He began to have a suspicion that there was something ostentatious in his repeated attempts to avoid meeting her; and after a day or two he saw clearly that his avoidance of the Annesley road was a distinct slur upon his own honour, if not (by implication) an insult to the lady. Would not an unprejudiced person say that it was an absurd piece of presumption

for him to think that there was a certain element of danger—an indefinite element of an undefined danger—in riding in the direction of Annesley?

He discovered that he had been treating both himself and her very badly; and in the force of this conviction he turned his horse's head toward the Hall. He rode past the entrance gates and on to the turf beyond the boundary of the park, and on by the little track through the meadowlands, fragrant with the earliest hay crop, until he reached the mill road, leading up the gentle slope. He stopped below the mill, the elevation of the road allowing of his seeing the roofs and gables of Annesley Hall, and, in the distance, Newstead. He was engaged in looking over the billowing foliage of the great elms, when he heard a man's voice behind him calling to his dogs. He glanced round, and saw a gentleman on horseback with half a dozen dogs—setters and retrievers—at his heels.

He knew in a moment that the man was Mr. Musters, although he had greatly changed during the seven years that had elapsed since he had seen him by the side of his wife half an hour after their marriage. His face had become larger and coarser, especially about the mouth. There was a sensual curve at the corners of the lips, and the impression which they conveyed was heightened by his eyes. He had been a handsome man long ago, though not without suggestions of those defects which the years had made prominent, Byron remembered; but he was sure that there were people who would call him a handsome man still.

Byron wheeled his horse about, and then Musters recognised him, and greeted him with some show of cordiality.

"I didn't see you right at first, or, of course, I should have known you," he said. "Your face hasn't changed much," he added, with a critical

glance. " You are as youthful in your looks as when I saw you—I suppose it must be six or seven years ago ; and you are what girls would call beautiful. You know that, I'm sure, you young dog ! I hear that you have been playing havoc among the wenches. Oh, we are not so far removed from London but that a rumour comes to us now and again of the notabilities of the season. You must tell me of your adventures in that direction."

" You would not find my narrative interesting, Mr. Musters," said Byron. " It certainly would not be stimulating to a gentleman of your experience."

Musters laughed.

" Oh yes ; I admit that I have had some experience," he said. " Every man of spirit has much to go through. The fact is, my boy, there are too many women everywhere. They can be got for the whistling. Good-working setters are much less plentiful. There's Clio—come along, Clio, girl, and show yourself"—a small black and white setter trotted up—" I had to give ten golden guineas for her in the autumn. But wenches—I hope you have been doing something to advantage yourself—that's a man's first duty: when he has made his position secure with a lady of property, he may go his own way afterwards and enjoy life as he pleases. With your advantages you should have no difficulty in getting an heiress at the end of your line. That old rascal who was in Newstead before you, left the place in a shocking state. I know that you are mortgaged up to the slates."

Byron did not make any response, he only looked coldly at the man beside him, who hastened to reassure him.

" Don't think that I blame you," he said quickly. " The old reprobate ! He cut down £15,000 worth of trees—the best in the park—all your property ! I cannot understand how you managed to keep your-

self in London as a man of your position should. The only way you can set yourself on your feet is by marrying an heiress. Lord, sir, a young chap like you should have no difficulty in that direction. Mary is the sort of girl that would have done for you. Eh, what—what are you blushing about? Did you fancy that I was about to ask you to take her off my hands? 'Tis too late now, I'm afraid, for you to hope to better yourself in that way. But that's the kind of wife you should think of—a couple of good estates—all the farms let, and ready to laugh at all the frame breakers in Nottingham. Be advised by me. By the way, someone said t'other day that you had written something in a newspaper—was it a novel or a copy of verses?—hang me if I remember which it was!—But, whatever it was, you'll have to give it up if you intend to settle among us. That sort of stuff is not for gentlefolk. You'll find us exclusive in Nottingham."

"We have a right to be so, have we not, Mr. Musters?" said Byron, looking smilingly into the coarse face of the man beside him. "We are the flower of the English aristocracy—we are all highly cultivated gentlemen, whose names will live for ever as the patrons of literature and the devotees of all the arts."

"I'm glad that you take the right view of the case," said Musters. "Maybe it was all a flam about your having written something or other. People are only too ready to say anything that will bring discredit upon a good name."

"Even among the gentry of Nottingham? It seems impossible, Mr. Musters, that a slander should find its way among the county families."

Mr. Musters had no ear for irony. Few representatives of the county families had. He smiled at Byron for a callow young fool, but he would not be hard on him.

"When you have lived among us for a year or two you'll know better," he said. "But I'm devilish glad to learn that there's no truth in the report that you were given to writing things; if you were, it would prejudice people against you in the county. You must come and dine with us some day next week. Let me see; Tuesday—would Tuesday suit you?—a family affair—no one but yourself. I'll put you up to some of the tricks of our neighbours."

"The temptation is too great to be resisted, Mr. Musters. I have no engagements. Are you sure that I shall not be inconveniencing you?"

"There is always a dinner laid at the Hall—that's all I can say. You'll get—I'm sorry that I must leave you just now. I'm rather late for an appointment that I made. Good-bye till Tuesday. What are those dogs about? Hi—hi! Flora, Clio, Tom Tit, Boney!"

He rode off whistling to his dogs, but evermore glancing rather anxiously, Byron thought, ahead of him and somewhat to the right, where there was a dip in the slope beyond the mill road and a small plantation of larches. Byron looked in the same direction after Musters had disappeared round the curve of the mill road. He saw after a short space of time, that Musters had jumped his horse over the low bank, and was trotting leisurely toward the little plantation.

He fancied he saw something of white moving about among the trees—it might have been a woman's dress, but it was not impossible that it should be the black and white setter, or perhaps a stray sheep newly washed. He was ready to admit the two last-named possibilities, even though his doing so made it necessary that he should believe it possible for the animals to be walking among branches that hung five feet above the ground.

After all, it might only have been the miller with whom Mr. Musters had his appointment among the larches.

Byron wheeled his horse and rode slowly back to Newstead.

CHAPTER V

BYRON came upon Vince on horseback before he was within view of the outlying trees of the park.

“By what luck have you come upon this road?” he inquired. “You went in the other direction every day during this week.”

“Would it not strike you that it was just because I have been five times in the other direction I am in this direction to-day?” said Byron.

“That would be the reasoning of the gamester, but I have learned that a man’s heart beats independently of all systems that the heart of man has yet devised.”

“And that is what brings me here?” said Byron.

“No, that was what brought Mrs. Musters to Newstead,” replied Vince.

Byron was startled, and, as usual, he flushed—the second time within an hour.

“What! Mrs. Musters?” he cried.

“Driving in her chaise with a pair of horses, two footmen, her elder little girl, and her governess—a pale-faced pattern of propriety, prudery overstarched, Sims by name,” said Vince.

Byron sat on his horse, and was thoughtful for some moments. Then he said—

“It was a formal visit; but I am sorry that I missed seeing—my cousin. My encountering Mr. Musters, as I did, does not make up for my deprivation.”

“I had prepared you for him; a popular man—a

hearty manner—joyful over his first bottle—petulant over his second—a negro over his third, but, oh, a popular man ! making his friends laugh, and his wife weep, and equally indifferent to both. He asked you to dinner ? ”

“ How did you know ? Were you at the other side of the hedge ? I begin to think that you are behind most hedges in the county.”

“ That is his warm heart. He keeps his heart over a chafing-dish spirit lamp, and shows it smoking to strangers. ‘ How d’ye do ? ’ is his first word, ‘ dinner ’ is his next, and ‘ hang ye ! ’ his third. He sometimes forgets his invitations, and is angry because the strangers whom he bids to his table ring his hall-door bell. Ha ! you are thinking that I have opened the door of a room full of sunlight for you.”

“ That was, I admit, what dazzled me for a second or two,” said Byron. “ You open your doors too suddenly in the face of one who is standing in the gloom of the hall, Vince. But I think we shall find that, when the door of that room of sunshine is opened for me, the portly figure of Mr. Musters will darken the entrance.”

“ His figure is capable of shutting out a good deal of sunshine,” said Vince. “ At any rate, you have promised to dine at his table whether he is present or absent. Have you made up your mind to relax the rigidity of your diet for that evening ? ”

“ I have not thought anything about that,” replied Byron. “ Is Mr. Musters one of those men who make a fuss over their guests’ eating and drinking ? I have heard of duels being fought and households shattered simply because a guest declined a second bottle of claret.”

“ There’s another vista flooded with sunset for you : the prospect of fighting Mr. Musters,” said Vince. “ What a pity it seems that the pistol bullet, which

would remove so many obstructions from a path to prosperity, should be withheld ! ”

“ Make your mind easy, friend Vince,” said Byron. “ I shall not give the man a chance of complaining. I showed some gentlemen in London the other day that I was not the milksop they took me for. I can drink wine when I please with the best of them. I am not afraid of Mr. Musters. By the bye, he was considerate enough to lecture me to-day on my deportment among the gentry of the county. It appears that a report got abroad, I have no idea how, that I had written and published something. There is a difference of opinion as to the shape that my offence assumed—whether it was a poem in a newspaper or a pamphlet in prose—it had even come to Mr. Musters’ ears. He gave me to understand that, if there was any truth in the rumour, I must be careful never to repeat the offence. My position among the gentry would be prejudiced by such an act.”

Vince screwed up his face into an expression resembling a smile.

“ It will be an amusing dinner, if your host should put in an appearance,” said he. “ What will your topics of conversation be?—and after you have both finished a bottle or two, and the restraints of sobriety have vanished, what will happen then? Ha! I would that it were possible for me to be present! The material that I should collect for my comedy of life would be invaluable. My mouth waters in anticipation of the scene. I would call the chapter ‘ The Amalgamation of Incongruities.’ ”

But Byron became grave. He assured Mr. Vince that he need not anticipate any contretemps at Mr. Musters’ dinner-table.

“ I flatter myself that I have seen enough of the world to be able to make myself at home even in the midst of the least congenial society,” said he coldly.

“ I ask your lordship’s pardon,” said Vince, parody-

ing his coldness, but with a very light touch and no sting of offence. "I quite forgot for the moment that I was addressing Byron, the traveller—Byron, the idol of society in town—Byron who, it is said, has set a new fashion for dandyism. Your lordship's dinner with Mr. Musters cannot be other than a function of mingled vigour and vivacity. You will tell me of it—if you should survive?"

"You seem to have at hand so many sources of information regarding all occurrences, it will, I am convinced, be quite unnecessary for me to give you any account of so simple an affair," replied Byron.

Having ridden back to Newstead, Byron waved his hand to his companion, and put his horse to a gallop upon the turf of the park.

He thought during that evening more of the visit that Mrs. Musters had paid to Newstead than he did of the invitation which had been given to him by her husband. He perceived quite clearly that, although Mary had parted from him with an abruptness that suggested a great deal to him, she had come to the same conclusion as he had arrived at respecting their relations. She was determined that they should meet and associate as cousins, and that they should both treat the past, now so long distant, as if it had been nothing more than a dream. She had visited him with her child in order to make the first move in this direction, and she looked for him to return her visit on the same basis of friendship—the informal friendship of kinsfolk. Nothing could be more satisfactory than the adoption of such a course, he thought; and it was in this spirit that he drove to Annesley Hall on the Tuesday for which Mr. Musters had invited him.

Once more he stood in the hall face to face with the picture by Thornhill; but he now gazed at it in surprise, for the expression of the man's face

seemed altogether different from what his memory told him it had been. His recollection of it was of a stern man ; there had certainly been a grave look in his eyes ; but now it seemed that the face wore a smile.

He was still standing in front of the picture when Mary appeared. She was coming down the stairs, and when he turned toward her his memory went back in a flash to the night when he had seen her on the stairs moving like a white ghost through the faint light to make her petition to the picture. When she came to him now, sending his memory flying back through the years that had changed him from a boy to a man, he knew the truth of his own heart. He looked at her now as he had looked at her then—with the same love—the same adoration. All his resolutions in regard to that friendship which he had cherished coldly for some days, were swept away in the flood of recollections that came over him in the space between her reaching the lobby and the last step.

“At last you are here,” she cried, when he had put both his hands out to her. “At last, my dear, dear cousin Byron ! Does it seem as if a month had passed since we were here together ? You remember the picture—I saw you looking at it when I was on the stairs. You have run many chances of a violent death, I have no doubt, since you were threatened by my ancestor. I think you may take it for granted that he will not menace you again.”

“That was my feeling when I came directly upon him just now,” said Byron. “I fancied that he looked upon me more benevolently than he did when I saw him for the first time. Look at the face closely, Mary ; does it not seem to wear a smile, ‘which was not so before’ ? ”

She glanced sideways at the picture, and shook her head.

"I complete the quotation which you began, and say, 'There's no such thing,'" she cried.

"You think my memory is at fault?"

"I think that if you were to see Dr. Drury at Harrow now you would find that he is quite benign, 'which was not so before.' It is not safe to trust implicitly to one's memory in the matter of expression, especially when one is imaginative. After I told you the story of that picture, I am sure that your imagination gave a severity to the expression that the painter never intended to be there. I must confess that I myself, after the accident to the picture, could not look at him without a sort of dread. I could not help wondering what he would do next. When I heard the sound of the carpenter's hammers and chisels bolting the frame to the wall, I felt more at my ease. Still, I never caught him in the act of smiling."

Byron kept his eyes fixed upon the picture. He was thinking of the white figure of the maiden whom he had seen kneeling where he was now standing. He turned and looked at Mary. To his eyes she seemed less changed than the picture. His memory of her proved more faithful than his recollection of the portrait.

"I am superstitious," he said. "I am a believer in curses. Have you heard the story of the last Prior? You know it was said he laid a malediction on Newstead."

"But he was too holy a man to lay his curse upon the place in his last hours."

"He may not have spoken it; but look at Newstead to-day—think of the fate of the family that inherited it."

"I do not see that there is anything in their fate to make it certain that the Prior laid his malediction upon them. I only think of the inheritor whose name will make the name of Newstead immortal. What, do you fancy that there is a double curse

laid on the place—the first being that of the poor old Prior, the second being that of my unfortunate ancestor ? ”

“ Some nights ago,” said Byron, “ I took to wandering through the old house, and after going into many uninteresting rooms I reached one that did not seem to have been opened for years. The lock was rusty, and there was no key ; but the woodwork had rotted away about the bolt, so that the door burst open when I set my shoulder against it. Such a surprise lay beyond the door ! The dust was under my feet like a Turkey carpet. Cobwebs—they hung from the ceiling like the drooping sails of a caïque. The place seemed as uninteresting as the other rooms until I found on the mantelpiece, protected by a bronze ornament, a slip of paper signed by my predecessor ; it was evidently meant to be attached to a sword, for it contained a statement that the writer had killed with that sword Mr. Chaworth, and an expression of regret that he could only do it once.”

“ And you found the sword ? ” said Mary in a whisper. She had plainly been startled by his story.

“ I searched in every corner, but without success,” he replied. “ It seemed as if the good old man was setting his house in order during his last days, and had prepared a label to fasten on to the sword, lest his successors should look on it as an ordinary weapon. It clearly caused him some uneasiness in his last hours to think that possibly he should not be known to posterity as a murderer. I suppose he must have died before he was able to tie on his callous confession.”

Mary shook her head and looked up to the features of the picture. There was a hint of fear in her own face.

“ You see the way he smiles now ? ” said Byron.

" You cannot but see his expression. It is not in the least like what it used to be. It is the expression of a man who is confident that he will eventually succeed in what he has set himself to do."

" And what do you fancy that he has set himself to do ? " she asked in a hushed voice.

" God knows—perhaps we, too, shall know some day," said Byron.

She looked thoughtfully at the picture. Then she rose quickly from her seat, saying—

" Let us go into the drawing-room. Why should we allow ourselves to get into this gloomy train of thought ? I am no believer in these superstitions. And you must try not to yield to them, Byron. The drawing-room is a more cheerful place than this. I cannot think what can be keeping Mr. Musters. He has been absent a day or two on business ; I looked for him to return earlier. I reminded him before he left that you were to dine with us."

Byron followed her into the drawing-room. Her slight figure was that of a girl. Seeing her walking in front of him, he felt that she was but returning to the piano after calling him the *Minstrel Boy*. Surely an hour had not passed since she had sung that song for him !

" I seem to be going into a place of magical echoes," said he. " The strains of ' The Minstrel Boy ' have not yet waned away into silence. I can still hear the triumphant notes at the close. But I have heard your voice singing that song when I have been in strange places, Mary. At sea by night, far away from land, I have awakened and heard the sound of your singing hovering above me ; and on some of those strangely lovely islands of the *Ægean* you have been my *Ariel*."

" Only without the power to serve you as my *Prospero*," said she.

" Do not say that," he cried. " Serve me ? Can

I ever forget the service that you did me? Was it not you who flung open the gate through which I passed into a realm of romance and poetry? Serve me? When I have been in doubt—in despair—your voice has come to me.

Thy songs were made for the pure and free
They shall never sound in slavery.

Those were the words of your charter to me, when you called me your Minstrel, and I know that, whatever people may say of my singing now or to come—however greatly they may despise my songs or deride my subjects, they will say, ‘He was on the side of Liberty—he sang out of love for Freedom.’”

“And so you will remain while you live, Cousin Byron; and when you are dead your songs shall inspire the faint and the feeble to work out their own salvation. In your last poem, only a few weeks old, there are some lines that will ever be looked on as the watchword of those who are striving for the overthrow of tyranny—

And Freedom’s battle once begun,
Bequeathed from bleeding sire to son,
Though baffled oft is ever won.

Those are inspiring words, Byron. I myself—I have felt inspired by them. Only the trumpet-call that inspires a man to action inspires a woman to patience. War is for man—waiting is for woman.”

She turned from him to the window. She walked across the room and stood against the flowered damask of one of the curtains, looking vaguely out to the park. The western sun was touching the topmost boughs with red.

It took him some moments to appreciate fully the force of the words—their application to herself.

The moment that he perceived her meaning he sprang to his feet, saying—

"I should be sorry to think that anything I wrote inspired man or woman to be patient in submission to tyranny."

She looked at him and smiled gently, shaking her head.

"There are tyrannies from which no escape is possible—a woman only knows of them, and a woman, if she prays aright, will pray only for patience—patience—patience," she said.

"That is the creed of the harem," cried Byron. "Patience behind the screen—submission to the bow-string and the Bosphorus. It should not be the creed of Christian women. There are tyrannies that no woman should bring herself to bear—indignities that her own sense of self-respect should—"

She held up a finger to him, but without looking toward him. He stopped in a second. There was a sudden silence in the room. From the shrubberies came the six-note call of a blackbird.

He crossed the room and stood behind her at the curtain.

"Dearest Mary," he said in a low voice, "you are unhappy. When I saw you on the day of my return I felt that you were unhappy—you who deserve to know nothing but happiness—you who have such sensibility as causes you to feel everything with double the intensity of an ordinary woman."

She made no reply to him. She kept her eyes fixed upon the red light on the foliage.

"Is it so bad as that?" he said. "Is it so bad that you cannot even seek to relieve yourself of its burden by telling me of it? Are not you assured that I shall be sympathetic with your unhappiness?"

"No, no," she cried, turning to him and giving him her hand. "No, indeed, I cannot doubt your sympathy, but . . . oh, it is too late now to say anything, even to you. If you have any feeling for me—and I know that you have much—you will help me—"

“Help you—tell me how—with my life—”

“You have gone on too fast ; you can help me, but only to pray for patience—for submission.”

He dropped her hand so suddenly as to suggest that he was flinging it from him.

“Never—never !” he cried. “Mine shall never be the voice that will join with yours in such a prayer. Patience ! Submission ! Good God ! these are not words for such as you ! I will not hear them from your lips.”

She passed her hand over her face as if her thoughts had become visible and she was trying to shut them out even from her own eyes. She took a few hasty steps from the window.

“Do not talk to me any more—oh, for God’s sake, do not talk to me any more ! I tell you it is too late to say anything. There are things that cannot be changed by much speaking ; then why speak of them ? I tell you that silence—submission—these are a woman’s best friends.”

“And I tell you, Mary Chaworth, that—”

“May I trouble you to pull that bell-rope ?” she said, regaining her usual calm voice by a marvellous effort. “It is already three-quarters past our dinner-hour. We shall wait no longer.”

It seemed as if Byron’s words to her were beginning to bear fruit. She was no longer so submissive as she had been.

He pulled the bell-rope, and when the servant responded she gave the order for dinner to be served.

“Mr. Musters has surely been detained, and without the means of sending a letter to apprise me of it and to apologise to you,” she said in the formal tone of a hostess. It sounded very cold, and there was in it a suggestion of rebuke to him for his warmth. Byron knew perfectly well that, if Mr. Musters were accidentally delayed in his business, he would not take the

trouble to apprise his wife of the fact, or to apologise to his guest.

He said nothing, but awaited in the silent room the announcement of the butler that dinner was served. He gave her his arm, and they went in silence to the dining-room.

CHAPTER VI

HE felt that he had never known anything so sad in all his life as her acting of the part of the genial hostess upon this occasion. The ease with which she adopted the rôle in the presence of the servants showed him with pitiless plainness how accustomed she had become to this part. She played it with the ease of an actress who had appeared many times in the same character. His quick imagination enabled him to perceive that only by long practice could she attain such dexterity as she showed, and he felt deeply for her. She had schooled herself to go through the incidents of her daily life giving no sign of suffering. A few minutes before she had let him see what was in her heart, and yet now she was chatting to him with ease and vivacity.

He admired her and pitied her with all his soul.

He tried to imitate her—to catch some of her spirit, but he was conscious of a partial success only. His vivacity was too studied. He felt that the servants could see hanging down behind, the strings which tied on the mask of comedy that he had assumed.

What did they talk about? The East, of course, to start with. What monsters the Turks were! What a pity it was that Bonaparte had not done civilisation a good turn by attacking them and sweeping them out of Europe, and then getting killed himself, before he had devastated so much of the world! Where were the Turks to be swept? Oh, anywhere!—was not the Bosphorus deep enough, or was it being filled up with the bodies of Sultanas in sacks? . . . The Hellespont

—he had really swum the Hellespont? Not so great a feat as that of Leander, after all! The lady must have been rather heartless, did he not think, or was she faulty in the other direction?

And Greece—why should the Greeks be always waiting for someone to do something for them? Why should they not do something for themselves? Were they content to be the bondsmen of a slave? Surely the lines in “The Giaour” would thrill them! Surely a people with so magnificent a past. . . .

There was the sound of horses and a chaise passing the window.

“Mr. Musters at last!” cried Mary. “He is too earnest a man of business; he has lost many a meal by his tenacity over a lease. Luckily we have treated you as one of the family, Cousin Byron. If we were having a dinner party, he would—”

Voices came from the hall, the voice of Mr. Musters, loud, boisterous, encouraging—the sort of voice that comes to one with the impression of a hearty pat on the back—and mingling with it, another voice, shrill, feminine, with a shriek of laughter.

Mary turned white and straightened herself in her chair. Her eyes were flashing.

The door was thrown open, and Mr. Musters and a lady, still laughing loud and long—a merry but discordant duet—bustled into the room. She had a word or two to say to him behind her hand before she had gone far beyond the doorway; he, following very close upon her, jerked his head forward to hear, and, responding, there was another outburst of laughter.

The lady at the head of the table had not risen at the entrance of this visitor, and the visitor advanced, the plumes in her immense hat nodding as she walked, and Mr. Musters making heavy strides behind.

They both spoke at the same instant, and both much louder than was necessary.

“What ! Byron ! Heavens above us ! was it for this evening I asked you ? ” cried Mr. Musters.

“I am very ungenteel, dear Mrs. Musters, but 'twas all Mr. Musters' fault,” the lady was saying at the very same moment, only at the other end of the table.

Mrs. Musters had dropped her napkin on the floor to the left of her chair—the stranger was advancing from the right. She stooped to pick it up when the lady stretched out her hand, and, taking a long time to find the napkin, Mrs. Musters gave her an opportunity—of which she availed herself—to withdraw her hand unshaken. She did not do so, however, without a sniff and a flounce. She was a large, florid woman—a creature of noble contours—opulent ; splendid hair of two distinct shades, large arms and round, teeth well displayed, filling up the ruby oval of parted lips.

“Mrs. Musters,” said the master, “I had no chance of preparing you, but that matters nothing ; I told Mrs. Ramsden that she would be welcome. Heavens above us ! you should see the mess that the builders and carpenters and painters, and Lord knows what else, have made of her house. She's spending some money over it—ah, the pickings that these Indian nabobs get at the Court of the Great Mogul ! Money ! What's money to an officer of the Honourable Company, with as many chances as Warren Hastings, the rascal, had of getting on in the world—eh, my Lord Byron ? But I'm forgetting my manners. Let me have the honour, Mrs. Ramsden ; this is our young friend and kinsman, Lord Byron. Eh, what, you young jackanapes ! ”

“Pardon me, sir. Mrs. Musters has finished dinner ; I must conduct her to the door,” said Byron. He had risen suddenly while his host was still speaking—that accounted for the “jackanapes !”—and he was in time to offer his arm to Mary, who, with her eyes

fixed coldly on the door, had left her place at the head of the table. She never looked either at her husband or the visitor.

But both her husband and the visitor looked at her, silently, but with expressions on their face that suggested a volcano.

Byron bowed to Mary at the door, and returned to his place.

"Now, Mr. Musters, we will talk about that jackanapes," he said quietly.

Mr. Musters burst into a roar of laughter; Mrs. Ramsden leant up against the table, smiling. Somehow her smile seemed louder than his laugh.

"Heavens above us! the lad is as ready to run me through the weazand as his grand-uncle was the Chaworth of his day," roared Mr. Musters. "But I'll take care that you don't do it. I'll apologise for the word with all my soul; and I'll swear to you that it was unintentional. It was, after all, your punctilio that called for it—in mistake, mind. You jumped up from your chair into my very face, and I had a notion that you meant to put a slight upon one of the most charming ladies in the county; that's you, Mrs. Ramsden—you have heard of Mrs. Molly Ramsden, in St. James's, I swear, Byron?"

Mrs. Ramsden was looking very roguishly at Byron, and Byron laughed in response.

"Mrs. Ramsden's charms are toasted nightly at White's," said he, bowing to the lady, who made a splendid courtesy to him, all her jewelry shivering and tinkling in the act.

"Oh, my lord, you are a desperate flatterer, as everyone knows," she cried, even before she had wholly regained her feet. "For myself, I vow that I have never felt so flattered in all my life as I am now to receive the attention of the noble poet, whom to read is to adore, and to behold is to worship."

"Madam, all the honour is on my side," said Byron, and he was sure that he spoke the bare truth.

"Hallo, what's this—what's this?" cried Mr. Musters. "Poet—poet! Didn't you deny the report t'other day, when I taxed you with it?"

Byron shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not sure that you taxed me with anything in particular," he said. "But if you did, and if I denied it, I'll stand by my denial now."

"It is only among barbarians like you, Mr. Musters, that the name of the noble Lord Byron is not known as a poet," said Mrs. Ramsden, striking Mr. Musters playfully with her folded fan—she had been using the fan pretty freely on her face, but the exertion more than neutralised the soothing effects of the current of air.

"I did hear something of it; but I warned him that it would not do for us, and he disclaimed the poetry," said Mr. Musters.

"I can furnish you with the assurance of a number of newspapers that I am no poet," said Byron. "They defend me most convincingly against such a charge. I am sometimes at the point of believing in my own innocence."

Mrs. Ramsden laughed, and said very archly that, for her part, she was certain that Lord Byron was a wicked man—wickeder even than people said—and Byron said that his head would be turned if he listened to her sad flatteries. Mr. Musters looked from the one to the other in a puzzled way. He had a sort of consciousness that he was being made fun of, so he swore against the servants for the delay in re-serving the joints which had been removed before his arrival with his visitor. He had ordered the butler to see that fresh plates were brought; and now he gave the bell-rope a pull to show the kitchen that he was not to be trifled with.

The viands were brought in before the bell-rope had ceased swinging.

"Seat yourself, my lord," he cried, for Byron, after opening the door for Mary, had not resumed his seat. "Seat yourself, man; you have not gone half through your dinner yet. If Mrs. Musters has chosen to go off in high dudgeon about something, that is no reason why you should have your dinner cut short. Sit down, I say."

"I have had an excellent dinner, I assure you," said Byron. "I wonder that the report about my eating did not reach you with the creditable one which you credited. There are a score of persons who know all about my diet for every one who has read my verses. I only dine twice a week."

"What, have your funds fallen so low as that?" cried Musters. "Sit down, and I'll do my best to raise a mortgage on whatever you have to offer."

"A box of pens," said Byron. "No, I'll not sit down again. There is nothing so disheartening at a dinner-table as someone who has just dined and is unequal to repeating the process. I shall join my cousin in the drawing-room for the time being."

"You are a fool; you'll be merrier here," growled Mary's husband.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mrs. Ramsden, with another roguish smile at Byron, by which she meant to suggest that the roguishness was with him.

"At any rate," said Byron, "you will be the merrier for my absence."

He spoke from the door, which a footman held open for him. He waved his hand with a joint bow, which only the lady acknowledged.

Before he reached the drawing-room he had clenched his fingers and ground his teeth at the thought of the brutality of the man whom he had just quitted. It was as if, with the opening of the door that admitted Mrs. Ramsden, a light had streamed within, illuminating

the secret recesses of the Musters' *ménage*. He could now understand why Mary should wear the appearance of a woman reconciled to unhappiness. He could now understand the meaning of her words in the drawing-room. Patience ! Yes, but for how long ? For how much ? There were acts committed against a woman which even the most patient should not suffer. To suffer them a woman would be a traitress to herself—consenting to her own dishonour.

The most elementary ethics of men of the stamp of Musters were, Byron knew, comprised in the phrase "common decency," and it was accepted as one of the tenets of the creed of common decency that a man who wanted to lead a free life must do so outside the house of his wife and children. To introduce into his family the elements incidental to his undomestic life was regarded on all hands as something that even laxity could not tolerate. It was plain to Byron that the answer to Mary's prayer for patience fell short of her necessities in such a case as had just been presented to his sight. Heaven, who had certainly heard her imploration for patience, by granting her this virtue in greater abundance than fell to the lot of most women to receive, had not made provision to meet such a contingency as the arrival of Molly Ramsden. Byron felt that if she had shaken hands with that woman he would never have forgiven her. One gets out of patience with the patient Griselda, and he could not have remained to witness Mary Chaworth's acquiescence in the humiliation her husband had offered her.

He admired the way in which she had behaved. Though taken by surprise—as he was now sure her husband meant she should be—she had adroitly refused to shake hands with the insult that had brazened itself before her. She had refused to remain in the room with it, and had departed with dignity.

But Heaven had granted her the gift of patience in abundance : she had left the dining-room herself instead of ordering the woman out of it.

He found her in the drawing-room. The candles had not yet been lighted, so that the room was in twilight. She was standing at the window where they had stood together an hour earlier. She turned round quickly at his entrance, and he saw that there was a frightened look in her eyes. That expression went to his heart.

“ My poor Mary, what you must have suffered ! ” he said when he had come behind her, and she had turned her eyes again to the cedar, which raised arms of benediction to the blackbirds and thrushes of the lawn.

“ Suffered—suffered ? That is nothing—suffering means nothing to me. But the children—the children ! ” she said.

“ It is pitiful—pitiful—and your own house too ! The house was yours, not his, and yet—”

“ He never went so far as this before,” she cried. “ I have no doubt that he invited you to dinner to-day believing that if you were present in the room I should not have the courage to leave it.”

“ He does not know you even yet, Mary. Did you look for me to remain by your side ? ”

“ No, no ; I know that you stayed in the room to prevent him from following me—from further insulting me, and to save me from seeing him insult you as well.”

“ You know me, Mary, better than he knows you. I felt sure that he would have followed us, and, perhaps, turned me out of the house, giving me no chance of seeing you—I went back to the room, and even succeeded in making myself pleasant to them. My poor Mary ! . . . But what can the man mean ? Does he suppose that you will submit to her staying under your roof ? ”

"She brought a load of trunks with her—he ordered them to be taken up to a room."

"Monstrous! Could anyone believe it possible that a man—and married to you—married to *you*! What will you do, Mary? He cannot think it possible that you will be content to remain here?"

She walked away from him and threw herself down on a sofa—the very sofa on which he had sat when she was singing her song for him long ago. She stared out straight before her.

"It has been going on for years," she said in a low voice. She seemed to be talking to herself, unaware of his presence. "I wonder was it my fault at first. I wonder was I to blame in any way. When I made the discovery at first, should I have given him to understand . . . but I hoped to win him back to me. I had so much confidence in myself—in the power of my affection for him—I really believe that I was fond of him . . . and the child . . . I thought that when our little girl was born . . . but he became worse; he hated the child, and then I hated him—I hated the man who was my husband."

She laid her head down upon the cushion, and he knew that she was weeping.

What could he say? He longed to say something to comfort her; but he knew that this was not the moment to make the attempt. What words that he could say would comfort her? He stood with his hands behind him in the silence. The little rustle of something of silk that she wore was the only sound in the room.

Suddenly, before he knew it, she was on her feet.

"The children must go," she said decisively. "Whatever happens, the children shall not remain in this house. He dare not interfere. Oh, I need not think of his interfering—that is the last thing that he would do. He will be glad of it."

"And you—you—what about yourself, my dear Mary?" he said, with all the tenderness of feeling that was in his heart for her.

"Oh, what does it matter about me?" she said. "My life is over."

"For God's sake do not say that," he cried. "I cannot bear to hear you say that. I shall kill him—I shall kill him! He has killed you, and I shall kill him—I swear it!"

"Hush—ah, hush! Will you make my task more difficult for me, Byron? You would not do that, I know."

"Am I to stand by—I, a man, inactive—a mere looker-on, while that ruffian who has made your life a wreck—who has robbed me—"

"Oh, Byron, I implore of you—"

"Forgive me, Mary. I am selfish; I think only of myself—of the happiness which might have been mine. I tell you that—"

The dining-room door had been opened for a few moments. The sound of loud laughter reached them in the drawing-room. He struck the top of a chair with his fist.

"I cannot stand it," he said. "I cannot stand here, feeling that I am powerless."

He took a resolute step toward the door.

She caught him by the arm.

"For my sake, Byron—cannot you bear it for my sake? When I can bear it, why should not you?" she said.

He caught the hand that was on his sleeve in both his own, and stood looking into her face, that looked up to his. So he stood for more than a minute.

"Good-bye!" he said suddenly. "I cannot stay here any longer. I cannot command myself. It will be best for you if I leave you now. Good-bye!"

"You are right," she said. "You must go. I know that you are leaving me because you love me,

Byron, and because you will help me, as you would any wretched woman who is foolish enough to believe that there are other considerations in life besides her own happiness. Kiss me, my Byron, and go away—to help me—to help me!"

She put her face—the tears were glistening on her cheeks in the dim summer twilight of the room—up to his, and it was she who kissed him—she kissed him twice.

"Only tell me how to help you," he said, in a passionless voice. "Only tell me. You must not do anything without telling me. Promise me that, Mary."

"I promise you. You are, I think, my only friend, and now you are going from me," she said, and for a moment he felt that she was asking him to stay.

"Listen to me," he said. "Every day at noon I shall ride to the Diadem, where we parted. I shall wait there for you to come to me to tell me all that you have to tell. Come to me when you have made up your mind—come to me and tell me how I can help you. That shall be my one aim in life—to help you."

"I will come—I promise you that, my one friend—my one dear friend."

Then it was that he kissed her, with a hand on each side of her head.

He hurried from the room, and sent a servant to the stables to order his carriage.

CHAPTER VII

HE could not go to bed. He knew that he would get no sleep. He felt more excited than he had done for years. The night was an exquisite one, of soft summer starlight, and sweet scents of dewy grass. May was a maiden placing her cool hand trustfully in the warm hand of her lover, June, and partaking of some of the glow that came from him. Streaks of the faint blue of the western sky appeared above the black lines of the yew hedges, but the blue darkened overhead, and in the east the stars were alight. The only sounds of the night came from the breathing of the trees—the soft breathing of an air through the foliage of May, very different from the crisp, restless rustle of October.

He strolled down to the brink of the pond. The little splash of a water-rat stirred up the surface in ripples large enough to sway the floating leaves of the water plants, as he seated himself on a carved stone bench above the sloping bank. He had much to think about, but his thoughts came upon him in a mob, not a procession.

Mixed with the recollection of how she had kissed him came a confused rush of emotions, and he found that his eyes were full of tears of pity for the unhappiness of the woman who had offered her lips to his own. How could he ever have fancied even for a moment that he loved any other woman than this, during the years that had passed since they parted? That was the wonder to him. How could

he ever have fancied that he could be happy with any other woman? He felt that all other women were but shadowy; she was the only one who was real. He looked into the water that lay before him, and saw upon its flat surface the reflection of many stars, and then he turned his eyes to the heaven, and saw the eternal ones shining above him. That was it; he had passed his life looking down instead of up.

And she loved him—of that he had now no doubt. . . . And she had told him that her life was over . . . and she had only missed by a month or two the chance of being made happy by him. Oh, if they had only met before the delusion of her love for the man who had spoiled her life had come upon her, what happiness would have been his, and hers—and hers; for he would have compassed her with his love! He would have had no thought but of love for her. What a life would theirs have been! What poetry he would have written! His poetry would have been thrilled through and through with the breath of this great love until the lines would themselves have breathed and lived. The man who had been with him in this place a few days before had said that suffering only gave immortality to a poem. That was a lie. With her by his side he would have written poetry that would have reached the heart of men—the soul of women; not such as had come from him—not poetry that filled the heart of men with doubt—the soul of women with despair. He could only write what was in his own heart—what was in his own soul: doubt in the one, despair in the other.

But with her . . .

The tumult of his passion of thought flung him about as a wrecked ship is flung about in the eddies of a whirlpool, with a single sail still tattering about the ragged, splintered end of the broken mast. He was surged about on the thought of what might have

been, and then whirled down into a gulf of remorse at his lightness of love during the years that had passed. How could he ever have been attracted by such faces as had flitted past him ? It was no wonder he felt that disaster had overtaken and wrecked him ; he had steered his course, not by the one guiding star of his heaven, but by the fitful reflection of the faint stars of the water.

An hour had passed before the thought came to him—the torn sail of a thought—that sent him to his feet in a moment as though a sudden noise had burst upon him close at hand :

Is it all too late ?

Why should it be too late for them to hope for happiness ? Why should they think of their lives as wrecked beyond hope of being saved ? They were both young, and they loved each other ; in the name of Heaven what else was there in life that they needed for happiness ? Youth and passion—why, there is nothing else in the world worth talking about. Nature hoots in derision at everything else. All her schemes and plans begin and end in these two precious possessions. All her care is for the maintenance of the two ; and these two belonged to Mary and to himself. Great heavens ! Why should they think of unhappiness so long as they possessed all that Nature holds best in the world ? He resumed his simile of the wreck—it had never left his mind—a wreck ? It was like assuming that a ship was wrecked because a bucketful of water had splashed over her bows.

In the force of his thought, despair gave place, not merely to hope, but to certainty. His soul was sensible of a tropical sunrise ; darkness one moment, the next a flood of light striking to the highest heaven above him, filling all the world with the glow of a new-born day. He saw it all clearly now ; she had only to come to him, and her shattered life would be renewed.

The force of that thought swept all reason before

it. It never so much as occurred to him that the woman might not look at the matter from his point of view—the point of view of the man who lived before civilisation came into existence to correct the ambitions of Nature. It did not occur to him that she might consider as a barrier to their happiness the circumstance of her being the wife of the man who had brought all the unhappiness into her life. But after an hour of exultation—the exultation of the man who is conscious of the possession of the two grand gifts of Nature—he began to feel a cold finger of doubt laid upon his heart. She might not be willing—such is the second nature which woman has acquired in place of the old Nature of the original woman—to rush into the embrace of happiness, simply because she was a wife.

Would she be unwilling? Then, under the influence of that original Nature with which men have not parted in exchange for civilisation and its restrictions, he felt that he must force her to accept the happiness from which she shrunk. But she had not yet shrunk from it. He had not yet made the proposition to her. He would make it without delay.

The stars in the western sky had begun to look timid in the dawn before he went indoors and on to his bedroom, and the sun was shining above the tree-tops before he fell asleep. By that time he had lost a good deal of the confidence which he had felt in his ability to force her to walk in the path that he would point out to her—the path leading to a tower, a stronghold of happiness. He had begun to think of the best means of persuading her. She loved him, of that he was assured; then how would it be possible for her to avoid seeing clearly that it was right in the sight of Heaven—that was how to put the matter to a woman—for her to go to him and away from the man whom she hated?

Oh, he had no trouble about the arguments. They came to him quite pat, and he thought that he was

the first man to whom they had occurred ; but yet he was unable to convince himself that they would have force with Mary Chaworth.

When he rose, without taking any breakfast, he ordered his horse to be saddled, and he rode to Diadem Hill, where he had agreed with her they should meet when she had made up her mind what she should do to save herself and her children. When he was riding along the gentle slopes, he was asking himself if she would have the courage to come to him, saying that she had made up her mind to go away with him. The bare thought of so remote a possibility brought before his eyes a vision of that island of the archipelago that he knew so well. He saw it once again, with its green-clad crags, its plumed palms, its latticed vines, its cerulean sea, and its turquoise sky. That was where he would take her ; there life for both of them would begin, and the spectral past that hovered over them with cold fingers ready to chill them would be blown away.

She was not at the Diadem. He rode about the hill for an hour, but still she did not appear. He remained for nearly another hour in the shadow of the trees, looking out over the landscape which he remembered so well, and his uneasiness became impatience. It was not until he had returned to Newstead that his imagination began to suggest to him the many reasons there might be for her failing to reach the hill at the hour that he had named to her. As a matter of course, he was led to blame her husband for her absence. A picture came before him of the brutal husband giving orders for her horse to be taken back to the stables when she was at the point of mounting—of his forcing her into the house and locking her in her room. He was equal to any gross piece of brutal oppression, Byron was convinced. Mary would certainly adhere to her resolution to give no countenance to the presence at the Hall of that creature with

the plumed hat and the high complexion ; and that would make the man furious.

This might well be, Byron reflected ; and then he brought himself into the picture of his imagination. Would it not be possible for him to ride by night to Annesley Hall and rescue the wife from her imprisonment—carry her off with him out of reach of the husband's fury ? He sat for hours thinking out plans for her relief, suggested by his restless imagination. He knew himself to be, not merely a dreamer of poet's dreams, but a man of resource and ready action—a man who could hold his own with sword or pistol against any other ; and he had come to think of Mary as his own, whom he longed to hold against the violence of her husband.

These visions of romance were very vivid while they lasted, but they gave place to others of a more sober and rational hue. He felt that it was quite possible that Mary herself had regretted making the promise to meet him on the hill—that she had come to the conclusion that he could not be of help to her, but rather the reverse, therefore she would think herself entitled to believe that, as the reason of the act had disappeared, she was under no obligation to keep her promise.

This idea tortured him for hours, and it was not until his clearness of vision (such as it was) was restored by the approach of the equable darkness of the night, that he became tranquil, perceiving as he did, that, as only a single night had passed since she had agreed to meet him, it was unreasonable for him to assume that she would have come to him so soon. He had told her that he would ride to the hill every day in the hope that she would come to him. Only one day had gone by ; he would go the next day and the next ; he would be patient, as she had been patient, and even though she did not come to him, he would not think of her as failing him.

On the third day—a day of clouds and stillness in the air—he found her waiting for him on horseback. Of course, her first words were of the children.

"I have sent them away," she said. "They have gone to Southwell to the house of my dearest friend, Mrs. Sunbury. There they will be safe. He knows nothing of them—he will not miss them. I do not think that he has seen them for weeks."

"And you," he said—"you cannot mean to stay in the house with him—with her?"

"I have not left my own rooms," she said. "He came to me yesterday with angry upbraiding—wild talk about insulting his guests—demanding an explanation from me—declaring that the suggestion that that woman was other than a most charming and virtuous lady was a gross slander upon her, and bidding me appear at dinner in the evening."

"And you never answered him," said Byron.

"I did not need to tell you," she said. "I did not even reply to him that I would not come down to dinner. He knew that I would not do so, and he had not the courage to pay me another visit."

"You must not stay any longer in the house with him. It is not possible that you intend to do so," said he.

"I have been thinking over that," she said, "and I have resigned myself to stay. Only by my staying is it possible to avoid an open scandal."

"What, do you not think that your remaining in that house is a greater scandal than your going away would be?" he cried. "Heavens! is it possible that you are ready to take your place in that house as—as—Mary, I tell you that it is impossible. Oh! my dear one, the ordeal would kill you. I already see a great change in you within the few days that have passed since this thing happened. Think of it, Mary—you, living alone and apart in that house,

separated from your children—for how long—how long?"

"It will not be for very long: he is fickle," she replied.

"And when he holds up his finger you are ready to return to him?"

"No, no—I saw long ago that that was impossible; but—ah! what is left for me to do?—tell me that."

"I will tell you, Mary; let me be the one to save you from the fate that awaits you in that house. You know that I love you—you know that you love me—come to me, my dear love—the one love of my life—come to me and forget that you were ever the slave of that man's caprice."

"Oh, Byron—dear Byron, if you love me—"

"Come to me, dearest—I have been thinking out the whole matter, and I know in what direction our happiness lies. We have both suffered, you and I—but what have my sufferings been compared to yours?—but our life together will be such as will make us forget everything of the cruel past. We shall fly from this country—we shall begin life anew—ah, dearest, it will be like going into another world—from earth to heaven—nay, from hell to heaven!"

He had leant forward from his saddle and caught one of her hands. His face was close to hers—his eyes were looking into hers, but she was looking vaguely, dreamily, across the slope of the landscape. Her hand was limp in his. She did not seem to hear his words.

"Think of what your life will be if you remain here," he cried. "Can anyone doubt what it will be so long as that man lives? Humiliation—worse—a degradation that neither God nor Nature can ask a woman to submit to. Infamous! And your children—do you fancy that this will be the last of his freaks? I tell you, Mary, that you will be culpable in the judgment of heaven and earth if you

remain in that house with that man who has treated you with a baseness that relieves you from every obligation to him. I want to save you from this, my dearest—oh, I shall save you."

Then she turned and looked at him. There was no suggestion of a reproach in her expression.

"My dear love," she said, "long ago, when you were a boy, you made me love you; every day you were with me that love increased—all the years that we have been separated my love for you has been growing until now—now it is so great that it gives me power to resist the temptation that is offered to me to do you a great wrong."

"A great wrong?" he cried. "Mary, I swear to you that only by your coming to me, joining your life with mine, can I be saved from falling back into the depths in which I once found myself."

"No, you will never fall back into those depths, dear, because you have heard me say that I love you, and that I shall continue loving you," she said, with tenderness in every tone—tenderness and tears. "I know that if I loved you any less than I do now I would not hesitate to gain my happiness at the cost of yours."

"They are not separate—our happiness is but one."

"I have thought it out, Byron. You are not an ordinary man. You are the head of a great house. You are more than that—you are a great poet. A splendid career is within your grasp, and it is because I love you I refuse—I refuse to be a weight round your neck—I refuse—ah, God, I cannot—I cannot—"

She bowed her head until her cheek was against her horse's neck. He laid his hand upon her bridle; in a second she had straightened herself upon her saddle. She snatched the bridle from his hand, and with a sudden jerk pulled round her horse's head and sent him forward with a leap. Before

Byron knew what she was doing, she was galloping madly across the fields. She was a mile away before he understood that she had succeeded in resisting the temptation by the simplest means possible—by flying from it. When she had broken down in her resistance to him in words, he felt sure that she was coming with him, and yet through the moment's strength that had come to her she was now a mile away—a faint moving speck in the distance of meadow-land and woodland.

“ My God ! what a woman I have lost ! ” he moaned.

For another hour he remained motionless where she had left him. He had a vague half-belief—a faint illogical impression—that she would return to him if only he waited long enough. It was the result of a shadowy survival of the early man's knowledge of his own importance in relation to the woman. She had acknowledged the temptation which he had offered to her ; had she waited for him to say another sentence, she would have yielded ; he was certain of that, and she had showed him that she also was certain of it. But she had a moment's strength given to her, and she had used it to save herself, in the conclusive way of the original woman. She had not resumed the thread of her argument with the man ; she had yielded to the true feminine instinct to save herself by flight, and she had saved herself.

Not quite understanding her, he remained on his horse waiting, in the force of his instinct, for something that his reason assured him was an impossibility. He should have known that she was kneeling at the window of her room, which commanded a distant view of the diadem of trees on the hill, thanking Heaven for giving her that moment's strength, which she had used to flee from the temptation that had come to her.

Was there in his secret heart a sensation of satis-

faction that she had resisted that temptation ? Did he feel a certain gladness at the proof given to him that she was not as other women ?

While he rode slowly in the tracks made by her horse at his gallop, he was ready to affirm that she had been mad to fling away the prospect—the certainty—of happiness which he had opened up before her. She said that she had done it for his sake. That was her sweet unselfishness : she was ready to sacrifice her own happiness lest she should interfere with his. That was the aspiration of a saint ; but it was founded on no more substantial a basis than the ecstasy of a saint. How would she ever be the burden to him that she had spoken of ? His house ? What were his obligations in regard to the house of Byron ? He came in view of the long range of front of Newstead when he asked himself the question.

There was the answer before him.

“ The obligation to maintain a tottering ruin,” he said. “ She has been foolish enough to place such a consideration before every other one—her happiness—my happiness ! ”

But she had also introduced the question of his future as a poet. . . .

He became impatient at the thought. How was it possible, he asked himself, that the circumstance of his being for ever by the side of the one dear soul whose presence had been to him the golden key that unlocked the gates leading to that spacious domain of poesy upon which he had entered, should be otherwise than a blessing to him ? Her sympathy—her guidance—the sense of her purity and graciousness surrounding him for ever—how could she think that such influences could be otherwise than beneficial to his work ?

Then the words of Vince came back to him—

“ Only by suffering—only by suffering.”

Was it possible that she believed that only by

suffering could a poet reach the heights on which Dante and Milton had walked, or penetrate to the depths of darkness which their poetry illuminated ?

He threw himself off his horse and went slowly up the steps of Newstead.

His butler met him.

“Lady Caroline Lamb is awaiting your lordship’s return in the drawing-room,” he said.

CHAPTER VIII

BYRON did not betray any surprise at this announcement, though it had come upon him with a shock of something more than surprise. The fact was that he was too much amazed to be able to realise at once the import of the words spoken by the butler. The incidents of the previous two hours absorbed his thoughts too fully to allow of his being able to consider such a matter as had been suggested by the servant. He had passed through a crisis in his life, and he felt that this was an anti-crisis—he had a vague impression of its being flat and of little interest to him.

She was out of the drawing-room and beside him in the hall before he had succeeded in collecting himself sufficiently to decide what he should do.

She had her hands upon his shoulders, crying first, cooing afterwards—

“Byron!—my dear Byron!—my dear lord!—my only lord and master of my life and destiny!”

“Oh, will you drink coffee?—I believe that I can command some excellent coffee,” said he—a poor response to such enthusiasm.

Her hands dropped from his shoulders.

“Coffee—coffee!” she said derisively.

“I sometimes take a cup in the afternoon, and I thought that perhaps you would join me,” he said. “It is good of you to visit me in my loneliness. Shall we go into the drawing-room?”

He held the door open for her, talking glibly about

trivialities as men do whose nerves are strung to the highest tension ; and they entered the room together. He glanced at her reflection in the high mirror of the console the moment that she passed the door ; he wondered how he had ever been attracted by such a reflection, and it was in the force of this impression that he said—

“ How charming you look to-day—more charming, if that were possible, than ever ! But you are never other than exquisite, Caroline. To what is our simple county indebted for the honour of this visit ? Will you have time to sit down ? ”

“ Oh, Byron, my Byron ! ” she cried ; and then she sat down and wept, with her usual dainty lace handkerchief up to her eyes. She was in weeping costume—he recognised that fact at once : he had become schooled to her methods of expressing herself. She was very careful that her toilets should be congenial with her emotions—so careful that, when she was conscious of a wrong note in her toilet, she immediately corrected it by a substitution of emotion. She always wept when she was dressed in white, with a blue sash. Byron had once said that the sash was the bit of blue sky behind the rain clouds, and suggested an intermediate rainbow riband.

He now watched her weep on the unsympathetic arm of the sofa.

He watched her for some moments, and then he rose from his chair without a word, and, seating himself at a small *escritoire*, began to write a letter, but not until he had conscientiously examined the quill. (His nerves were very highly strung indeed.)

She started to her feet and was beside him in an instant. She snatched from the desk the paper on which he had just written the date, and, tearing the sheets into a hundred pieces, snowed them through the room with the gesture of an angry woman flinging a missile.

"How dare you treat me in this way?" she said. "Do you know me so little as to fancy that I will submit to such infamous—such inhuman contempt?"

"Do you know me so little as to fancy that I will submit to your silly intrusion at such a time as this?" he said quietly. "I believed that you had something that you accounted of importance to say to me, and I was prepared to listen to you with patience. But instead of saying what you had to say, you began to weep without any object, and I thought that you would be the more easily composed if I occupied myself in another part of the room. Pardon me for my rudeness. Now may I beg of you to let me know your reason for this visit of surprise?"

It was now her turn to be surprised. When she had stormed at him in the old days in the fashion of which she had just given him a florid example, he had always responded with a smile or a laugh; upon one occasion only had he suggested to her other possibilities, and then she had not been raging at him; she had only been looking at Miss Milbanke.

She was surprised at his harshness; he was undoubtedly rude; but he had just come from seeing the woman whom he loved fly from him; though it is doubtful if the lady before him, had he made this explanation, would have admitted the plea of extenuation.

She gazed, pouting (he had once thought that she pouted very prettily), and looking velvety and innocent while she said—

"Oh, Byron, how you have changed! Oh, who could have believed it possible? What can have changed you, dearest Byron?"

"My dear Caroline," he said good-naturedly, "I understood that we were playing with counters, not with current coin. I had no idea that you would

bring your tokens to be cashed. Surely you will not go so far as to tell me that you were acting *au grand sérieux*?"

"Oh, heavens ; I laid my heart at this man's feet, and he—when he has trampled it into the mire—he asks me if I did it *au grand sérieux*," cried the lady, beginning to pace the room with her hands clasped at first, and then flung passionately toward the ceiling, after the style of Mrs. Siddons in *The Grecian Mother*. Lady Caroline had studied her best effects.

"Pardon me," said Byron, "but you forget that I was by your side when we saw her in that part. Any comparison would be unjust."

She stopped in the midst of her passion.

"What do you mean ?" she demanded.

"Mrs. Siddons ; you imitate her with astounding ability ; but *The Grecian Mother* is a poor play. You should try the dagger scene in *Macbeth*, in which she excels ; it is grander."

In a second she made a rush to the wall ; she snatched from the panel the Turkish dagger presented to Byron by Scott through Murray a few weeks previously—she clutched it by the haft, and in a flash she had flung the sheath, with its coral and turquoise gems, across the room, and held up the glittering blade in the act to stab herself.

"Thus—thus do I take your advice—the dagger scene—I will—thus—"

"You are mad—mad—drop the dagger—drop it, I say !" cried Byron, struggling with her. She was lithe as a leopard. He felt her wrist slip round under his fingers. For a few seconds they went backward and forward—he forced her back till the dagger was high above her head ; had he let go her wrist the point would have fallen upon his face—she went back so far that to save herself from being overthrown she fell upon her knees.

He had the dagger in his hand. They were both

panting from the struggle—gazing with fierce eyes at each other.

“ You are a madwoman ! ” he gasped.

She was still on her knees. She covered her face with her hands—he saw the marks of his fingers on her wrist.

“ For God’s sake, Byron, forgive me ! ” she said, between her sobs. “ I am mad, but you have driven me mad. No, no ; I do not blame you—only—pity —have pity—Byron—my love—my love ! ”

He laid the dagger on a table and went to her. He was greatly affected.

“ Dear Caroline, I have been to blame,” he said. “ It was brutal of me to utter an unworthy taunt. You have always treated me far better than I deserve. Give me your hand. I shall never forgive myself.”

She suffered him to raise her, and she dropped from his arms—reluctantly—into a chair. She averted her head, still sobbing fitfully. A long strand of her beautiful hair had, in the course of her struggle, become loosened, and it fell in soft coils on to her shoulder, and made a subtle embroidery of gold thread down the bosom of her frock, and even over the blue silk of her sash.

He stood watching her for some time, not without remorse. But he could say nothing beyond the words that he had spoken to her.

She was the first to break the silence.

“ I know you have come to hate me,” she said, sobbing gently between every word.

“ No, no ; you are wrong—quite wrong, I assure you,” he said.

“ You think me silly—you cannot understand how love is a woman’s whole existence,” she said ; and he never forgot her words.

“ I think I can understand it now,” he said gravely. But he was not thinking of her, but of another. It was from the other that he had learned this truth.

She looked up quickly. Her sobs had ceased with extraordinary suddenness. He noticed a light in her eyes. He wondered if she really fancied that she had triumphed.

"Oh, Byron, why did you come into my life?" she cried almost piteously.

"I have been wondering that for some months," he said.

"What? And you talked of Destiny—you consoled me by declaring that it was your destiny," she said quickly.

"Did I? Did it console you, Caroline?" he asked.

"It did at the time. I gave up everything for you, Byron."

"You told me that you gave up several men for me—you mentioned their names. But I deserve your reproaches."

"I have never reproached you."

"That was your generosity. But I have never ceased to reproach myself."

"If I have led you to do that, I am glad that I came here to-day."

"I have been asking myself why you came here to-day. I am glad that you have answered me. But, as I have told you, your visit was unnecessary. Still, your coming has made me reproach myself still further. Well, as you have accomplished your mission, perhaps—"

She was on her feet in an instant.

"You would turn me out of your house?" she cried. "You fling me away? You spurn me from your presence with gibes?"

"My dear Caroline, I am thinking only of yourself," he said. "I pray of you not to give me cause for any further self-reproach. Even your reputation—people have cruel tongues."

"Your tongue is the most cruel," she cried.

"I have dared all for your sake. There was a time—"

"There never was a time when I should have been indiscreet enough to ask you to pay me a solitary visit at my house," said he.

"You are a wretch! But I know who inculcated these notions of propriety upon you. There is only one person who could do it. You were a changed man from the day she forced herself into my room and found you there. Belle Milbanke! You do not know her; but I have known her. She always hated me; she mocked me—this timid, country-bred girl!"

"Take my advice, Caroline, the last I may ever give you. Go back to your home and your children, and pray to Heaven to give you the heart of a little child—the heart of Belle Milbanke. I cannot tell you to leave my house, but I can leave you in it alone."

He went toward the door. She easily intercepted him. Her movements were liker than ever to those of a panther.

She was frantic; but she was also tired. She had become frantic three times within a quarter of an hour. He looked into her face and saw that she was acting. She had been treating him as if he was a fool.

"Give me the dagger!" she gasped.

In an instant he had turned round, pale with anger. He snatched up the weapon. She thought that he was about to kill her. She gave a woman's shriek, and cowered before him. He thrust the haft into her hand, crying—

"There—take it—take it! I will not stop you this time!"

He was gone from the room before she was aware that the weapon was in her hand.

He hurried down the hall, but paused when half-

way to the porch door. He heard the clang of the dagger on the floor of the drawing-room, and he laughed. Then he heard the door open quickly, and the sound of her voice ; she was laughing, but he knew that her laugh was that of a woman whose cheeks are still pale from a recent terror. He waited until she came up to where he stood. She was pallid as death.

“ I hope we shall not have rain before I reach The Grange. I am the guest of my dear friend, Mrs. Maudsley, of The Grange ; you know her ? ” she said quite calmly.

“ I have not that honour,” he replied. “ Your carriage— ”

“ It is an open one ; I ordered it to wait for me at your gates,” she said.

“ A pair of black horses ? I saw it some distance up the road, as I came through the gates. I hope the rain will be delayed. Good-bye.”

She glanced back at him from the porch ; a footman was holding the door open for her.

“ *Au revoir*, my lord,” she said, with her eyes fixed upon him.

“ Good-bye,” said he.

She went down the steps. The man closed the door, and Byron strolled back to the drawing-room. He picked up the dagger from the floor and searched about the legs of the sofa for the sheath, which she had hurled away from her. After some trouble he found it. It was nothing the worse for its ill-treatment ; nor was the blade of the weapon ; he examined it with some care before replacing it in its sheath. He smiled while he fastened it upon its hook on the wall ; but his smile did not last.

He had got rid of her, but not without a display of some brutality. He was fully conscious of this fact, and the satisfaction that he felt at his achievement was almost, but not altogether, neutralised by

his reflection upon the means he had thought necessary to employ in order to effect it.

He could not get rid of the feeling that he was to blame for the closeness of their association the previous year in London. He had heard a good deal about Lady Caroline from his friends, and yet he had, out of sheer wilfulness—in exactly that spirit which he displayed all his life in rejecting the warnings of his friends—taken upon him the playing of a part in that *comédie à deux* which was entirely to her taste.

And the last act in this little comedy had just been played with great spirit in his drawing-room—he did not include in the play her *rentrée* to the hall, where she had become commonplace, but commonplace with a certain sublimity due to the effect of her sudden recovery of self-possession—the last act, with its tawdry heroics, and the usual dagger of the ill-treated heroine.

How well she had managed to maintain the traditions associated with her appearance in society ! He did not believe that she had seen the dagger on the wall when waiting for him to arrive ; he felt confident that it had merely caught her eye hanging there when he had uttered his unworthy taunt, and she thought it a pity that so opportune a “ property ”—in stage language—should be wasted.

And she had actually deceived him, just as Zeuxis had deceived his brother painters. They had been associates in the comedy, and yet she had only to become a little extravagant to make him believe that she was in earnest. She had made a fool of him up to the last.

He accepted that as the penalty for his folly in allowing himself to join in her original fooling, and he considered that accounts between them were now square. But as he stood at the window, and looked out into the grey day on this, the eve of June, he wondered if he would have received Lady Caroline in precisely the same way, if he had not

come straight to her from watching that piece of horsemanship which Mary Chaworth had displayed.

He came to the conclusion that, although the woman had tired him with her tantrums long ago, still, it was rather fortunate, both for her and himself, that he arrived feeling some bitterness in his heart against womankind in general.

CHAPTER IX

BYRON dismissed the actress from his thoughts as easily as one dismisses the story of a dull play—as easily as one forgets a morning rainbow—a meteor's trail—a rocket's golden whirl. He was not in a mood for comedy.

He was not without hope. He went every day to the hill and waited—sometimes for an hour—sometimes until late in the afternoon. His horse did not need to be guided; it turned its head directly toward his destination the moment it went through the entrance gates. He knew that if she wished to see him, Mary would at once go to the hill. But she did not come to him. She dared not trust herself. She had saved herself once, but not by trusting to her own principles—principles never yet saved a woman from love—but by the speed of her horse; and she would not trust herself again.

That was how he came to think of her absence after a week of fruitless visits to the trysting-place. She had no need of him. She found that she could continue living under the conditions which prevailed at Annesley Hall, and without seeking help from him. He never saw her either on her horse or in her carriage on the roads. He might as well have been living a thousand miles away from her. Only once during this time did he hear anything about Annesley Hall. His information came from Vince.

Of course Vince found in the narrative a good deal that was humorous and picturesque—yes, pic-

turesque from the standpoint of an artist who confines his practice to the grotesque and the bizarre.

“I had it from Charles, a footman with morals and an occasional purple eye—purple in its earlier stages, saffron overhung by a thunder cloud in its later,” said Vince, assuming the pose of the amused narrator, fastidious of details and conscious of the incongruous, so long as it does not detract from the design of the composition. “Charles was faithful to his principles as well as to his plush, hence the local inflammation which caused the discoloration around the eye. But he was compensated, and compensation really means consolation in such cases as his.”

“So much for Charles and his black eye; an excellent prologue to the tragedy—or is it a farce?—I think it must be a tragedy that you have to relate, you look so amused,” said Byron.

“The classifying of a drama depends only upon the temperament of the one who undertakes such a duty,” said Vince. “The funniest comedies that I ever saw were those that had set out as tragedies. I have exploded over the last scene in *Hamlet* acted in a barn, simply because the Prince of Denmark and Laertes fought, the one with a shovel, the other with a poker belonging to a different set of fire-irons. So the impression of tragedy is dependent upon the thickness of a lath of iron.”

“Therefore an incident should be related before it is classified; and I am not yet in a position to put a name on the one which tarries on your telling,” said Byron.

“True. The demon prolixity is the offspring of a country life and abundant leisure!” said Vince. “Charles of the purple eye was abundantly prolix when he came to me for advice; but perceiving his fault, I should have refrained from indulging in it myself.”

"Is that a specimen of the morality of Charles?" asked Byron. "If so, 'tis sound, though coming from a man with a black eye."

"His morality was not inflamed," said Vince. "But 'tis not for a servant to criticise his master's visitors."

"Was morality one of them?" asked Byron.

"On the contrary, it was Mrs. Ramsden who appeared at Annesley Hall," said Vince. "Molly Ramsden, large, a peony among the roses of woman-kind; vivid, with a laugh. She was Mr. Musters' latest flame."

"Flame?—a firebrand. I have seen her and heard her," said Byron.

"It is not possible that she was there when you went to dinner?" said Vince.

"Not at first: she came in later. I knew that it would interest you too much to hear about her, so I refrained from telling you."

"I can appreciate your reticence. Reticence implies confidence, though many people are superficial, and think just the contrary. But you did not know who the woman was?"

"Not exactly. But I saw the woman—a flame, a firebrand, one of Sir Humphrey's thousand-candle beacons to be a warning to mariners. Is there a Mr. Ramsden? Was there ever a Mr. Ramsden? Was he her husband, and, if so, was she ever married to him?"

"All pertinent questions suggested by the glare of the lady. It is understood that Mr. Ramsden is her husband—an Indian nabob, who may reside in Ormuz, so well endowed is his wife. She has been in her house for a year, with several changes of maids, and now she has brought painters and furniture tailors into the place to add to its attractiveness."

"Mr. Musters hinted at that as an excuse—if such were needed—for her visit to Annesley."

"A visit which terminated yesterday—not without recrimination. You see, it is impossible to be close to a flame without getting heated."

"And Mr. Musters got burnt?"

"It was at breakfast two days ago. Charles was in waiting—but he thinks it must have begun earlier. She had the bad taste to call him a *sot* because the honest English squire prefers a bowl of rum and milk, with a couple of eggs beaten in, for breakfast, to the more usual chocolate. He objected to the word, and his objection took the form of flinging her chocolate pot out of the window, without going through the preliminary of raising the sash. She retorted by upsetting his rum over the table, and that upset his *setter*, *Dolphin* by name, who was sitting by his master's chair. The gentleman hurled a hot muffineer at her, which she just escaped, and, in responding with a dish-cover from the cutlets, not being accustomed to the ranges of the room, she sent her missile pretty fairly into the centre of the lustre chandelier. A carving knife upraised—the lady's shriek—Charles' interference and his consequent wound, made up the battle of the breakfast table."

Byron roared with laughter.

"It is an epic," he cried. "It is Homeric—but the dish-cover among the lustres is distinctly Miltonic."

"Charles spoke of a few incidental lyrics after the room had begun to look untidy—trifling with poised plates—flinging forks—plate holders—a toast rack—the pistol fire of the pitched battle."

"Lyrics—the pistol fire is the lyrical element of a campaign—the cannon fire is the epic. And it all arose over a remark of the lady, who preferred chocolate to rum for breakfast?"

"Ah, so poor Charles believes, but he dropped a word or two in the course of his prolixity that were to me as the taking of a lucifer match out of its tube—illuminating in an instant. The truth must be faced,

though Charles, through causes already hinted at by me, insisted on by him, does not see things just now so clearly as he might—there is another and a younger lady showing a fluttering pennon above the amatory horizon—a pennon like a luring finger, signalling hope.”

“Ah, a cutter? Mrs. Ramsden is a three-decker.”

“Without being impolite, it may be said that one speaks of a three-decker and Mrs. Ramsden in the same gender. But a three-decker is ponderous when one only wants a pleasure yacht. When we want a pretty bird to perch on our finger, we do not buy a swan, but a canary.”

“And Mr. Musters has found this out?”

“A canary—a dainty little yellow flutter—yellow—golden.”

“You know her?”

“I have seen her. He paid a visit a few days ago to a certain Mrs. Maudsley, of The Grange; he met her there; I have seen her driving with Mrs. Maudsley—a golden canary petted by men, under the name of Lady Caroline Lamb. What, you have heard of her?”

Byron had given an exclamation so soon as the name of Mrs. Maudsley, of The Grange, was mentioned; and now once more he roared with laughter. The untiring Lady Caroline had thought it worth her while to annex the simple country squire, of very country manners and tastes. She was, as Vince had described her, a cutter who could capture a prize in the shallowest waters.

“Oh yes; I have heard of Lady Caroline,” he replied. “Who has not heard of her? I saw something of her in town last year.”

“Is it possible? Then you will be more interested in the story,” said Vince. “It seems that he went to The Grange one day. I believe it was the very day after Lady Caroline paid her visit to you.”

"So you know that, too, you rascal?"

"I looked for her coming every day," said Vince. "When I heard how she had attached herself to you in town, I wondered if she would let you have a rest in solitude at Newstead. But to the story. Mr. Musters visited Mrs. Maudsley alone—Mrs. Ramsden is not on visiting terms with Mrs. Maudsley—and there he met Lady Caroline. It looks as if the canary had hopped on to his finger without a moment's delay; and he was fool enough to brag of it to Mrs. Ramsden—Charles heard him—when she was unkind to him the next day. She somehow heard that he had gone a second time when he pretended that he was going to the Quarter Sessions. The next morning the battle was pitched, and before lunch Mrs. Ramsden left Annesley Hall in what looked like a baggage waggon, Mr. Musters following her, but only as far as the turn that leads to The Grange, where he was to dine. That is all the story that Charles the black-eyed had to tell; except the most important part to him—to wit, the compensation for the abrasion. The question of its adequacy or its inadequacy would not interest you."

"But the rest of the story compensates for the want of interest as to his compensation," said Byron. "Vince, that woman is a wonder!"

"You will need to give me other tokens of the identity of the one to whom you refer—every woman is a wonder. To which of the phenomena do you refer?"

"Did you think that I meant Mrs. Ramsden? Oh! Mr. Vince, do not make a pretence of ignorance for the sake of a *bon mot*," said Byron. "I tell you that she is a wonder. It is a pity that she is so much of a woman—that is her only shortcoming."

"Therefore, you were able, without reasoning with her, to prevent her from settling at Newstead?" said Vince.

"I don't believe that she intended to do that," said Byron. "But 'twould be folly to say with any degree of definiteness what were her intentions. Lady Holland used to affirm that her greatest charm was that one never knew what she would do next. It was a fearful joy entertaining her for a single evening at any house."

"That is the sort of woman one tires of in a very short time; there is nothing so tiresome as perpetual novelty," said Vince. "Will the Squire be disappointed in her, do you think?"

"Or will she be disappointed in the Squire?" said Byron. "I believe that the disappointment will be mutual."

"Yes, eventually; but in the meantime—"

"In the meantime the unhappiness of the only good woman increases," said Byron in a low voice. "Why does not someone kill that man?" he added, after a pause.

"Would such an act of justice diminish from her unhappiness?" said Vince.

"Can you doubt it?" said Byron.

"Yes, I doubt it," replied Vince, after the lapse of a thoughtful half-minute. "I doubt it. But I do not think that God would be very hard on anyone who killed Musters before he kills his wife."

They separated without another word.

One of the two, at least, was not in want of a subject for thought during the rest of the day.

What was to be the end of this history—this series of escapades of the man to whom Mary Chaworth considered herself bound? That was the question which occupied all Byron's thoughts. She had told him that her husband's fickleness would be certain to drive Mrs. Ramsden from Annesley, and till that event took place she could only be patient. To

think of it! To think that she was counting upon her husband's fickleness to give her a chance of living once more under the same roof as her children!

But now that he had proved even more fickle than she could have anticipated he would be, she had not got any nearer to the feebly satisfactory end which she had hoped for when Mrs. Ramsden would take her departure. What was she to hope for now? Was she content that the conditions under which she was living should continue for the rest of her life? Was she willing to condone and condone—a fresh condonation every week? Did motherhood so crush a woman's spirit as to make her ready to submit to any humiliation lest her children should run the chance of dishonouring their father?

He believed that her whole aim in life was to keep her children living in ignorance of the life their father led. She would not separate herself from him lest there should be what she called a "scandal"—as if the scandal of her continuing under the same roof with him was not the greatest that could exist!

But all such questions as that of the relative proportion of the scandals were insignificant compared with the question of how long the existing scandal was to continue. Was there any loophole of escape for her from the detestable position which she had accepted with resignation? She was little more than a girl, and was she to spend the best years of her life as the past fortnight had been passed? What had she to look forward to except misery until her old age—rather until her husband was made forcibly aware of the limitations that age brought upon a man?

If she had anything to hope for in the future she might, with some show of reason, make up her mind to be resigned to an intermediate unhappiness; but, though innocent, she had accepted a life's sentence to

misery and humiliation without any but the slightest sign of rebellion.

He lost all patience thinking of her submission. In the force of his passionate thoughts he struck at obstacles in his room with his fist. He knocked over a chair and kicked it in a cowardly way as it lay upon the floor ; he flung his box of pens on the floor and stamped upon it. He was as insanely enraged in thinking over this thing, which certainly was of vital importance to himself, as most men are, for a second or two, over irritating trifles. His demonstration did not last longer than a second or two, and then he flung himself into a chair, his hair tossed, his knuckles bleeding. He felt disagreeably flushed, and he had a sense of his own impotence to take any action likely to be productive of good.

He had found the story of Musters' quarrel with his guest highly amusing ; but the picture that now came before his mind, of the white girl, standing at the half-open door of her solitary room upstairs, terrified at the crashing of the glass in the breakfast room—the shouts of the man—the shrieks of the woman—trembling, not knowing what was about to take place, was not one that moved him to laughter. How had she lived through it ? What sort of life was hers in these days ? Pitiful ! Pitiful !

And yet he could not do anything to help her ! She would not allow him to make any move on her behalf. She had drawn a barred shutter between herself and him—this, although he was ready to put his arm about her and carry her into a new life where she would know only happiness. That vision of his island that mirrored itself in the sapphire sea came before him once again—vivid, placid—an orange grove, a riot of roses. . . . It was waiting for them, and yet she would not come—she would not come. She was ready to spend the rest of her life waiting at a half-open door for the next terror that was coming.

And he could do nothing !

He had promised Vince to inspect on the next day a vehicle which the latter had designed for himself, employing a local wheelwright to build it out of the remains of the carriages which had been bequeathed to him, in the true satirical spirit, by his father, in addition to the annuity on which he lived in his cottage in something more than comfort. The vehicle was a sort of dog-cart, but heavy, and Vince's horse took rather a prejudice against it the moment he saw it. Byron assisted in persuading him to intrust himself to the embrace of the shafts, which, having originally belonged to a chaise, were unproportionately stout for the new vehicle; but Vince would not allow him to join him in trying the animal in the cart. The animal permitted himself to be warped by his prejudices even when between the protective shafts. He showed his uneasiness in many ways, and only after a long struggle did Vince persuade him to go through the entrance gates. He returned after an hour's argument with the horse on the road. Of course the man had got the best of the argument, but he would not go so far as to say that he had convinced the animal that the new machine was harmless.

But while Byron was spending that hour in exercise outside the gates, a lady driving her own phaeton and pony pulled up beside him, with a cheerful greeting. He had no difficulty in recognising the figure, features, and, crowning all, the hat of Mrs. Ramsden. She nodded her plumes until they swept over his hair, but he escaped their effect by an exercise of politeness, bowing to her as if she were the Princess, the generosity of whose proportions she all but equalled.

“ I could not resist the opportunity of recommending myself to your lordship, though I had only the honour of meeting your lordship once before,” she said. “ But I hold that 'tis the duty of neighbours

to be neighbourly, and, besides, Lord Byron, the lord of poets, has no greater admirer than my humble self."

"You overwhelm me, my dear madam," said Byron, with another bow.

"I have ever been, from a child, a worshipper of the Muse," cried the lady with some pride.

"And I trust that the Muse has responded with a grant of inspiration, madam," said Byron. "I trust that the public will have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with your style. The world is waiting."

"Oh, my lord, you flatter me; my poor attempts would not be worth the printing!" she cried in all the pride of self-depreciation. "But if your lordship really condescends to take an interest in my trifles, I should feel honoured by a visit."

"At Annesley Hall?" said Byron maliciously.

"At Annesley? Good heavens, no!" shrieked the lady. "Do not speak to me of Annesley and that odious man. I cannot bear to hear his name."

"I am the better pleased that I have not mentioned it," said Byron.

"A dangerous man, my lord. He believes himself to be quite irresistible to ladies; but for my part I have never thought of him as anything beyond a blustering country lout. He knows nothing of modest women."

"What! although you were his guest for some days, Mrs. Ramsden?"

"Do not taunt me with my innocence, my lord. If in my simplicity I attributed to him a benevolence which was really only the trail of the serpent—the trail of the serpent, I repeat—was I so greatly to blame? He found me in the midst of my builders' mess, and when he almost carried me off by main force I thought him the soul of kindness and hospitality. My lord, I was soon undeceived. Honour?—the wretch does not know what the word means! But, thank Heaven, my principles are inseparable

from my life even when I go on a week's visit away from home. The man's attentions were never otherwise than odious to me, and to escape his persecution I fled from his house. It may have been ungenteel ; still, my lord, I ask you, what is a reputation for gentility compared to—to—”

“ To a reputation for—for—reputation ? You were quite right, Mrs. Ramsden. Honourable people will acquit you of any charge of impoliteness. What, madam, if one knows that one's host is about to offer one poison in his wine, is one to be called impolite for rejecting the cup ? ”

“ I am fortified by the excellent views of your lordship on this delicate subject. And now they say that the fellow has taken up with a tiny wisp of a woman who is staying at The Grange. Has your lordship seen her yet ? ”

Byron marvelled at this woman's having hit upon the “ wisp ” ; he thought that the sobriquet was of his own invention.

“ I believe that I did see a somewhat slight lady—” he began.

“ Slight ? ” came the lady's crescendo, interrupting him. “ Slight ? Why, the creature is a mere wand—a barley-stock—and her hair, whether it is her own or not, is at least five shades too light for her complexion. The poor thing looks such a silly piece, however, it would be but an act of charity to warn her against that man. Plain and all though she may be, even when disguised by art to a distasteful degree, she should not be condemned to suffering, perhaps ruin. How do you feel on this subject, my lord ? ”

“ The matter is too delicate for my handling, madam,” said Byron.

“ Well, perhaps that may be so,” said the lady. “ At any rate, I hope that I shall have the honour of a visit from your lordship before many days have passed. Your lordship may count upon a hearty

welcome. I promise your lordship better entertainment than may be obtained from reading my humble verses," she added, with a roguish coiling and uncoiling of the lash of her whip.

"I ask for no more intellectual enjoyment than may be derived from a perusal of your poems, Mrs. Ramsden," said Byron.

Mrs. Ramsden smiled rather broadly, and then laughed.

"I have heard that you are wicked," she said; "but you must promise to visit me in a purely intellectual spirit."

"Mrs. Ramsden, I shall shave my head, and come in the disguise of the Prior of Newstead," said he.

"Hush!" she said reprovingly; "that borders on the impious. But I vow that I shall count the days until I can welcome you. In the meantime you may have an opportunity of warning that barley-stock—she really is like a barley-stock—that Mr. Musters is a rascal with no sense of honour, and only the feeblest appreciation of good looks in a lady. I wish your lordship good-morning."

She put her pony in motion, leaving Byron bowing bareheaded on the roadside. She had driven round the bend in the road before he laughed.

CHAPTER X

BYRON could stand the inaction no longer. Every day he found himself facing the question : *What was to be the end of the business?* Why was he down here at Newstead living the life of a hermit ? What was he waiting for ? What did he expect to happen ? What could possibly happen that would bring about a change in the situation of matters in regard to Mary and himself ? Had he made up his mind to follow her example and to spend the rest of his life praying for patience ? He felt that he had great need to begin his prayers without further delay.

He had ridden to the hill a couple of days after his pleasant little chat with Mrs. Ramsden, not because he retained any hope of meeting Mary there, but simply for the sake of assigning some destination to his ride. He felt very sorrowful before setting out, and as he rode slowly along the roads and across the country he did not find himself becoming more cheerful. Never before had his recollection of the lovely autumn day when he had first gone over this ground with her by his side, been so vivid. It was not merely that he had a general sense of what had been in his heart at that time—the exultation which had followed her unconscious revelation of the night before ; for, added to this, he was able to recall the minor impressions which had been his on that morning. Once again he sat upon his horse among the trees of the “diadem” of the little hill and thought of how she had pointed with her whip to the man in the distance who was

coming toward them. He remembered how he had clutched at the pommel of his saddle when she spoke those words—those deathless, deadly words—“*the man whom I have promised to marry!*” and he had gazed down the slope and seen the man advancing slowly, as it seemed, but inexorably as Fate. Mary had not smiled at that time. He had never forgotten that. He wondered if she had had a presentiment of the part that man was destined to play in her life. For himself he knew that he had had no such consciousness. He had hated the man who was shutting him out from happiness, but he had never thought that Mary would be otherwise than happy with that man.

Now he looked across the green landscape and longed for his approach. After all, it would be better than an aimless waiting—the crash that would come when he fell upon the man with the thong of his riding-whip round his hand, and the horn at the other end swinging above his head. Perhaps the man would beat him to death, but he felt that even that would be preferable to inaction. He would at least have a chance of avenging Mary’s wrongs upon the body of the burly ruffian who had brought misery into her life.

Before he quite knew what was in his mind, he found himself galloping along the track that Mary had taken when she had fled from him a fortnight before. Down he went along the borders of the fields, across the meadows, as hard as his horse could carry him. He did not slacken his speed until he had reached the gates at Annesley Hall. His horse was steaming as he pulled up at the porch and asked for Mr. Musters.

Mr. Musters was not at home, the man said. He had driven off in the morning to Quarter Sessions—he didn’t know what Quarter Sessions; but he believed that that was what his master had said.

Byron had his suspicions, but he kept them to himself. After all, why should Musters have given orders that he was to be denied to him? Whatever Musters was, he was hardly likely to dread meeting such an antagonist as his wife's cousin. He would think himself capable of crushing the life out of all the poets in England before sitting down to his breakfast of rum and milk.

Byron rode slowly away from the Hall. He did not make any inquiry of Mr. Musters' wife. If she was within the house and became aware of his visit, and of his riding away without asking to see her, she would know that he was still loyal (formally, at least) to the spirit of the incident that parted them. He had not pursued her that day; he did not mean to pursue her now.

He rode slowly back to Newstead. He scarcely knew whether he was glad or sorry that the impulse on which he had acted was frustrated. It would have been a great joy to him to break the monotony of his life by taking a swinging blow at that man; but if the result were to be the death either of his antagonist or himself, Mary would be the sufferer; and all that he had been thinking about for weeks was how it might be possible to diminish her suffering.

He dismounted at his own porch, the groom took the horse, and he entered the house. He had not taken half a dozen steps up the hall before the butler came quickly forward, saying—

“Mrs. Musters awaits your lordship in the drawing-room.”

He was able, as usual, to control himself in the presence of the servants. He muttered a word or two about having ridden too far, and handed his hat and whip to a footman. The butler threw open the door of the drawing-room.

He greeted her formally, until the door was closed again; then he put out both his hands to her.

"Mary—Mary—my Mary!—you have come at last," he whispered.

She withdrew a step or two, shaking her head sadly.

"Ah, Byron!" she said; "I hoped that you understand—surely my last act should have convinced you that I was in earnest in all that I said to you!"

"I do not know what you said to me then. I hope I know what you are going to say to me now," he cried. "I waited for you at the hill every day for a week. I hoped that—but you have come to me now."

"For a moment—only for a moment," she said. "Byron, I know that I trust to you—I know that you will be generous—that you will not give me pain."

"I want to lead you by the hand to happiness, Mary."

"Then you will never again speak to me as you spoke when we last met. Do not think so meanly of me as to assume that I could ever be happy through a wrong-doing. For a moment, perhaps, I had a sense of temptation. It is past. It will never return. . . . But it is not about my happiness that I came hither to speak; it is yours—your happiness, my dear Byron!"

"You cannot speak of mine without speaking of your own—there is no difference between them. I said so before."

"That is true, indeed, for I can only be happy if I know that your happiness is assured. I want to make it assured in the only way possible."

"There is only one way, Mary, and you know what that way is."

"I do. I am about to point it out to you. I got a letter from your sister Augusta yesterday, and she told me in it much which I did not know before. She was aware of the good feeling that there is between us, and she was sure that my influence with you in this matter would be of weight."

"And the matter—what is the nature of the matter?"

"Miss Milbanke—I did not know that you had proposed marriage to her last year."

"I did so. I fear that I did so through selfish motives. An impulse—it was a sudden impulse. I had been foolish—she seemed a sweet girl—not knowing my own heart, I thought that you were far away from me; but now—"

"Now I am farther away than ever, but Miss Milbanke is closer, Byron."

"She refused me very promptly, and she was right. I thank her daily."

"I believe that Augusta has seen her: at any rate, she has learned that Miss Milbanke is disposed to think of you more kindly than she did."

"That is only another way of saying that she would refuse me with greater emphasis."

"No; she has spoken to Augusta of you with great tenderness, and your sister left it to me to plead with you on her behalf. I do so, Byron, with all my heart. I believe that with this girl your happiness will be assured. Such an influence as marriage with her will have upon you is just what you need for happiness. Think of her in this house, Byron; she will make it a home for you—for you, my poor boy, who have never known what a home is. All your restlessness will cease. You will never wish to wander again."

"She is nothing to me, Mary. If you are pleading for my happiness you are also pleading against the best interests of Miss Milbanke—against her happiness. I do not love her. I have never loved anyone but you, Mary, and it is impossible that I should ever love another. Ah! my dearest—"

"Byron, for Heaven's sake! Ah, I trusted you to refrain from addressing me in this way, or I should not have come here to-day! You have made me sorry that I trusted to your honour."

"We may never meet again, Mary, and I should never forgive myself if I failed to speak to you directly from the depths of my heart. I know what is in my heart now, and I know that I shall ever love you, and you only. Ah, my love, there is still time for happiness in our life ! Come to me—stay with me."

"And I trusted you—I trusted you !" she cried piteously. "You force me to fly as you did before, but this is for the last time. I shall never trust you again ! "

She spoke with passionate vehemence, facing him with dignity. There was scorn in her first sentences ; but in her last there was tenderness and sorrow. She bowed her head when she had spoken, and, after a pause of only a second or two, she walked to the door.

Byron made no move. He stood there watching her, the fervour of his last words still shaking him. His face was more than ever like that of a marble statue. He watched her open the door and pass through into the hall, without so much as glancing back at him.

He threw himself into a chair and bowed his face down to his hands.

He had only been seated a few seconds when he heard the sound of the door being quickly re-opened. He raised his head. She stood there—at the door which she had closed. She was deathly pale—trembling—one hand pressed against her side.

He was on his feet. For an instant the glorious thought overwhelmed him—

"She has come back to me—she has come back to me ! "

It was only for an instant.

"He is here—my husband—he has just entered—I heard his voice—he is coming hither ! "

She gave a quick glance round the room. She fled for a door at the farther end. It was fastened, but the key was in the lock. She turned it, opened the door, and slipped through, closing it behind her.

"Of course he'll see me!—I'll take devilish good care that he sees me! Don't trouble yourself inventing lies, my good man. The fellow in the hall said the drawing-room. This is the door. I know the house better than you do. Ha!—here we are."

It was the loud voice of Mr. Musters that drowned the protestations of the butler. His voice sounded like the trampling of horses' hoofs on stone. The door was flung open, and he stalked into the drawing-room with a loud guffaw, pointing his riding-whip at Byron with a shout of—

"I knew it; of course he is in here!"

Byron had seated himself at the moment of Mary's disappearance. He had not helped her to escape. He could not understand the cause for her trepidation. Only when a woman has been living for some time in the house with her husband without speaking to him, she would scarcely care to be discovered by him in another's man house—that was the thought which passed through Byron's mind at the moment; he felt that his duty to Mary compelled him to act in accordance with her wishes. He knew that the room beyond the door through which she had gone communicated with the hall, so that she could leave the house when she pleased; but it would be necessary for him to detain Musters for some time to allow of her getting out of the grounds of Newstead.

He rose at the entrance of Musters, saying—

"This is a surprise—to what am I indebted for the honour of—"

Musters gave the door a prod with his riding-whip, and it shut with a bang; then he advanced with a swagger toward Byron, saying—

"I want to have a chat with you, Byron, about Lady Caroline Lamb. Now, you know that you have behaved bad—cursedly bad—to that lady—you can't deny it."

"Then I suppose I had better not make the attempt to do so, Mr. Musters," he said quietly.

"You had much better not," said Musters threateningly. "Upon my soul, you behaved scurvily—I never heard of anything much worse."

"Then I find that I have a wider experience than you, Mr. Musters. Shall I give you an example of what I call more scurvy treatment of a lady?" cried Byron.

"I did not come here to discuss the niceties of black-guardism, let me tell you," said the other.

"No? By the way, what did you come here for, Mr. Musters?"

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself—I do really, Byron. If it was any ordinary lady one shouldn't so much mind, but Lady Caroline—a lady whose beauty and accomplishments—a fair, tender-hearted young creature—an innocent child—Oh, I am ashamed of you, Byron!—I am ashamed of you, upon my soul!"

"How far would your feeling carry you, Mr. Musters?"

"How far—what do you mean?"

"If you come with me I'll take you to the room in which my predecessor in this house fought his duel with that Mr. Chaworth whose picture hangs in the hall at Annesley. Lord Byron killed his adversary. Would you care to visit that room with me, Mr. Musters? I might be able to show you not only where the deed was done, but how it was done."

Musters laughed.

"Keep cool—keep cool, my lad," he said; "don't fly out upon me like that. Sink me if you are not a young fire-eater. If I thought for a second that you had a suspicion of my courage I would take you at your word; but I know that, whatever you may think of me, you don't doubt my courage."

"I certainly do not. I saw you entertaining Mrs.

Ramsden as a guest, and now I understand that you are championing Lady Caroline Lamb," said Byron.

"Don't speak of the two in the same breath," said Musters confidentially. "The one—I only meant to do her a kindness; the painters and the plasterers had made her house unfit to dwell in. I invited her to Annesley out of pure benevolence; but she turned out a hussy—it served me right."

"That is precisely the opinion that I formed on this point. I am so glad that we agree there," said Byron.

"Don't ever mention her name to me again. But the other—ah! that brings me back to the point. You know that you behaved very badly to her, Byron."

"Look here, Mr. Musters," cried Byron, "I have heard that statement twice from you—I do not wish to hear it again. I refuse to discuss the matter with you further. If she has constituted you her champion—"

"She left it entirely to my own discretion," said Musters. "She is an angel—a poor, ill-treated saint, sir! I do not know how you had the heart to—but there is no use talking over her wrongs—her husband—he did not know the treasure that he had found."

"Other husbands have shown themselves to be equally dense, Mr. Musters," said Byron.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Musters.

"I mean to say that you—you, married to the best—the noblest woman who lives, have made her life a hell to her!" cried Byron. "You have humiliated her in her own house as few women have ever been humiliated. You have insulted—"

"Has she constituted you her champion?" laughed Musters.

"Every man who has a heart in his body should be her champion—every woman should feel that you have insulted her sex by your treatment of Mary

Chaworth," cried Byron. He had sprung from his chair and spoken with passionate vehemence, getting closer and closer to the other until at last he was standing over him with clenched hands.

Mr. Musters did not move. He sat there looking up at the handle of his riding-whip, but without making any suggestion of an intention to use it.

"We have come to the point sooner than I expected," he said, without any show of anger or even irritation. "I promised Lady Caroline that I would—well, it does not matter what I promised ; something quite different was on my mind. You can make reparation ; you can do us both a good turn."

"I want to have nothing to do with either you or her," said Byron, crossing the room, with his hands behind him.

"A man is as God made him," said Musters. "Can I help it if I am indifferent to-day to a woman who attracted me yesterday ? So far as I can see, that is how everything of our sex was meant to do by Nature. I can't see that in this way a man differs from the rest of creation. It is that accursed thing called marriage that turns out of doors all of Nature that we possess—the endowment of God, mind you—and makes us sinners. I don't blame Mary, but, by Heaven ! I don't blame myself—no, by God, not *that*!"—he snapped his fingers, getting upon his feet. "I'm sick of the bonds of marriage, Byron."

"Bonds ? They did not fetter you to any great extent, so far as I can learn, Mr. Musters," said Byron, turning round from the window, out of which he had been looking with his back turned to Mr. Musters.

"I want to free myself altogether," said Musters. "Turn round, man, and listen to me like a Christian. Are you aware that it is you, and not I, whom Mary loves ?"

Byron did not need to be further exhorted to give all his attention to what the man was saying. He

had turned round in a moment, grasping at one of the curtains so spasmodically as almost to jerk it off its ring.

" You say that I—that I "— he began in a husky voice.

" No ; I said that she—I asked you if you knew that she has loved you for years."

" How could I know that ? How could you know it ? "

" I found it out by accident some years after we were married. You have never heard that she walks in her sleep ? "

Byron was silent.

" It is the truth. I found her one night in the drawing-room—it was past midnight. I heard the sound of the piano and her voice ; she was singing. I went downstairs, and found her seated at the piano, singing that song—you may have heard it—' The Minstrel Boy to the War is gone.' When she had ended it, she rose, and picked up a miniature portrait of you—it was done from the picture which your mother had of you, and was always in its case on one of the tables—she fondled it in her hands, speaking to you —calling you her minstrel boy, and then getting frightened for you—imploring someone not to kill you, and saying that she loved you. . . . I watched her for some time. She never awoke, but went upstairs to her room."

He paused and looked at Byron, who was still clutching at the curtain ; his lips were parted with excitement, his eyes gleaming.

" Well—well ? " he said, in a tone of whispered inquiry.

" Well ? That is all there is to tell," said Musters. " Don't think that I felt jealous of you. Oh no ! even then I was past feeling jealous of you."

" Why have you come to me with this story ? " said Byron. " Why have you told me that—that you

suppose she has—more than her natural feeling for me—her cousin ? ”

“ I have told you because I think that you should know exactly how we stand,” said Musters. Then he smiled rather curiously, adding—

“ She is still an attractive woman, Byron—there are scores of men who would think her beautiful. I shouldn’t wonder if you yourself . . . anyhow it is no harm to know. . . . Oh ! I am not jealous, I give you my word ; in fact, I have often said to myself, ‘ Why the mischief did she not marry Byron in the first instance ? ’ ”

“ In the first instance ? Is it possible that you suggest . . . can it be that I am wrong in interpreting your tone ? ” . . .

“ I suggest nothing ; I only say that, if you had married her long ago, we might all have been happier to-day.”

“ That is true—whatever you mean to say, be assured that that is true. But now it is too late.”

Mr. Musters jumped up from his chair in a second. He went close to Byron and looked into his face.

“ Is it ? ” he said in a whisper, and down came the curtain with a startling sweep under the force of the sudden wrench given to it by Byron.

Musters took a step or two back, laughing curiously. Then he turned and went to the door by which he had entered.

“ Stay where you are, Mr. Musters,” said Byron in a low voice. “ You have said something so strange—so frightful— ”

“ Don’t be a fool ! ” cried Musters, in a loud, irritated tone. “ Don’t be a fool ! I took you for a man who had seen the world, and who knew how to take a hint when offered in a friendly spirit. Hearken to this, my friend : I’m going off with Caroline Lamb, and ’tis unlikely that I shall ever see my wife again. She doesn’t care a snap of her fingers for me, but she is

desperately in love with you. That's the whole case. It rests with you to—to—oh, curse it ! how much plainer do you look for a man to be ? A man of the world ? By my soul, you should be back in the second form at Harrow ! Oh, be hanged to you, for a ninny ! ”

He sprang at the handle of the door, and stamped into the hall, banging the door behind him. Byron heard his voice saying a word or two of abuse to the footman as he left the house.

CHAPTER XI

BYRON seated himself slowly on the sofa. He felt curiously dazed. It took him some time to recover himself ; and then his thought framed itself into his whisper—

“ Thank God that she shall never know the man to whom she is married ! ”

That was his first thought. Whatever might happen, she would be spared the supreme humiliation which was the import of her husband’s words.

He heard a sound down the room. Mary stood there.

“ Merciful Heaven ! you—surely you went through the door ! —I saw you go into the other room,” he cried.

“ You forgot the second door,” she said. “ It is locked. I was compelled to stand in the space—the thickness of the wall—between the two doors.”

“ But you did not hear— ”

“ I heard everything—perhaps not—but enough—enough—more than enough.”

She went toward him—unsteadily—she had to catch at the back of a chair once—an edge of a table. She had stretched out her arms toward him like a child learning to walk—she would have fallen on the floor if he had not rushed forward and caught her in his arms.

“ Byron,” she murmured weakly, “ you were right—I was wrong ; I should have gone to you. I come to you now, if you will take me. We shall never be separated now.”

“ My dear one ! My Mary ! ”

His arms were about her. There was silence save for the sound of their mingled breathing—the duet in unison in which passion alone is audible.

She separated herself from him in a moment, with a cry of “ The children ! My children ! ”

“ They shall be with you once again, dearest—they shall come here,” said Byron. “ Into their life also happiness shall enter.”

“ I must have them with me at once—to-day,” she said.

“ Why should you not ? ” he said. “ You said they were only so far away as Southwell. We shall drive there when you please. Is there any need to be precipitate, considering—you are afraid that, perhaps, when he finds that you are no longer at his mercy, he may try to keep your children from you, in spite of the words which you overheard him speak in this room ? ”

“ I am afraid. I could never feel safe unless they were beside me. His moods change from day to day—from hour to hour.”

“ But he hates the children, and they detest him, although you have tried to teach them that it is their duty to love him. When love has to be taught as a duty, it ceases to be love.”

“ Ah ! I remember days when he seemed to love them—he has played with them for hours—that was long ago—oh, it seems so long ago that I can scarcely think now that I ever knew such a time ! I shall have them with me now for ever.”

“ None shall make you or them afraid, my beloved one. My Mary, let this be my first service for you. We shall go together to Southwell, and bring them back with us. Why pause for an hour ! I shall order a carriage at once.”

“ Ah, that is what I hoped—that is what I longed to suggest ! You understand better than anyone what

is in my heart, Byron. With my children away from me I should never know an hour's happiness—an hour's security."

"They are my children, Mary."

She was in his arms again.

But there were details to be talked over. She must go away with him. Of course, he saw that it would be impossible for her to take up her residence at Newstead. What would her friends do when they met her out driving with him on the roads? It would be intolerable to meet her old acquaintances if once she were to leave Annesley. No matter how deeply everyone might sympathise with her, knowing something of the character of her husband, she would none the less be shunned the moment that she forsook her home.

But they did not discuss for a moment the possibility of remaining at Newstead.

"Oh, for the wings of a dove!" she cried. "The wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest! I feel that that is what I long for most—rest—rest! I have not known it for years! I feel as a poor slave must feel who has worn his shackles, riveted—soldered on to his limbs for years—when a day comes on which they are broken—severed from his life for ever. Rest—I seem to want nothing else just now."

"Poor slave!" said Byron. "Your fetters have been heavy—their iron entered your soul! How have you survived the galling of the shackles? But now your day of freedom has come, and the sun will never set upon it. Dear one, when I was among the islands off the coast of Greece I thought of you every day. They are the loveliest that are to be found in any sea. They cannot be described by words."

She smiled.

"What," she cried, "'Those Edens of the Eastern wave'?"

"I never felt the poverty of my rhymes so strongly as when I had made an attempt to describe one of the islands of Greece," said he. "One would need a pen plucked from a wing of a bird of paradise, dipped into the sea of sunset hues, to write the glories of the least of them. I thought of you daily—nightly—when new islets sprang from the waters beside us; and my one thought was: 'What happiness to be here with her—resting here with her for ever!' Dearest, I seemed to see the embodiment of Rest looking out from every orange grove—beckoning from every myrtle brake—standing with golden sandals on the golden sand just where the ripples breaking whispered, 'Hush!' Dearest, that figure beckons to us now. We will not refuse to put out our hands to her, greeting her with loving words. Rest! Do we want anything better in the world?"

"How did I ever resist you before?" she cried. "Ah, what a picture you draw for me! I can hear the nightingales. I can taste the perfumes of the orange and citron. Oh, for the wings of a dove!"

When they came back to earth—dropping leisurely down, with all the delicacy of a sea-bird descending to rest on the waters, they agreed that it would be tempting Fate to make any delay in their flight. That night, he pleaded; but she showed him that that would be impossible. He did not want her to leave Newstead.

"I am afraid," he said. "I am afraid that something will happen, and so interfere with our plans. I have had experience of suchlike slips of the cup from the lip. It looks as if Heaven grudged us such happiness as ours—will be."

"Do not say 'will be'—say *is*—as our happiness *is*," she cried. "Ah, do not doubt me, Byron! Do not fancy that I shall change my mind. I shall be with you to-morrow and ever afterwards."

He let her go reluctantly. He was willing enough

to trust her ; but he had a great distrust of Fate. He had had his confidence in Fate rudely shaken on that day when he had first been with Mary on the Hill, and she had pointed with her riding-whip to the man who was coming up to them, saying—

“ That is the man whom I have promised to marry.”

He had never quite trusted Fate since that day. He had always found it better to be a little ahead of Fate, so to speak—to insist on cash payments, as it were, and no running up of bills which might never be met.

But she had gone ; he had found it impossible to keep her. He would have liked to order horses to be put into a carriage and galloped off with her to his “ Eden of the Eastern wave ” in hot blood both of them ; but the islands of his archipelago were far ; and even to reach London required a score of horses.

He, too, began to long for the wings of a dove.

Byron had a good many orders to give to his man. At first he would not encumber himself with much luggage ; a few portmanteaux would be sufficient ; the remainder would have to be sent after him to London. He would be in London for at least a week. He hoped to hear from his solicitor that the sale of Newstead had been carried through. If so, he would indeed be free.

When he had perfected his arrangements, he had nothing to do but to await the morrow and all that it would bring to him.

He could only look forward to happiness. He had no misgiving that would come to lay a chill finger upon his warm anticipations. He had no thought except of satisfaction at the result of the incidents of the day. His conscience, so far from reproaching him, gave him lavish commendation. He was rescuing a good woman from the intolerable thraldom of a brutal husband. He was conferring happiness upon her in place of the horrible torture to which she had

been subjected. He knew well what it must have been for her to live with such a man—a man who could make in cold blood the proposal that had come from him.

And what must have been the feelings of the wife who overheard her husband make such a suggestion to another man?

Byron had ample knowledge of the effect that overhearing those words had upon her; but he felt in his heart that he would be ready to forego all the advantages that the incident brought to himself if he could have spared her the terrible insult.

But she had heard and suffered in silence, and he, Byron, was to spend his life in the endeavour to wipe from her memory the words which she had overheard her husband speak. He had made up his mind to that. He felt that his life would be well spent if he succeeded in achieving so much.

With the coming of night there came to him the thoughts that come only with night. He went, as usual, out of doors, and on to his favourite stone bench on the bank above the fish-pond. It was almost midnight, and the majestic tranquillity of a summer moon, within a day or two of being full, overhung the world. It was inspiring—strengthening. He breathed of the moonlight, and its spirit entered his spirit, bringing with it all the stately influence of the night. The living silences of Nature around him conveyed their ennobling impression to him, and he sat there thinking what their life—his life and hers—should be when they came together. Poetry—they would be living poetry—breathing of it such deep and glorious draughts as he was now drinking of the moonlight.

But he would show the world that all the poetry which he had yet written was but the uncertain prattling of a child compared with what he could do. The world would be filled with the fame of his poetry as the world was filled with the moonlight. And

it would all be noble. He had written some ignoble lines in the past ; but he would never write any in the future. How could he have an ignoble thought with her beside him ? He would put his pen into her hand and bid her draw it across every line—every word that did not tend to give health and strength to the heart of men. He saw now clearly of what a power in the world he was master. Once or twice he knew that he had blown the true note through the trumpet that had been set to his lips ; in the future it would not be merely a solitary note of truth that would come from him : he would ring out a strain so true, so majestic, that all the sleeping world would wake and listen.

He sat there in the influence of the moonlight until midnight was long past. He leant his head upon his hand, looking into the broad water at his feet. The moon was not high enough in the sky to cast her silver shield on the surface of that mirror, so that he could see it from where he sat ; but the moonlight that saturated the air was spread like a film of satin gauze over the varnished leaves of the water-lilies, and every tree on the bank was inverted in the water. He could count their leaves.

While he sat there dreamily gazing, he became aware of a moving reflection among all the motionless pictures in the water. It slipped from tree to tree—something whiter than the moonlight—a figure—he saw it clearly one moment where the trees were more straggling. He raised his eyes quickly to the trees themselves, and he fancied that he saw a movement of something white among the long shadows on the grass. In another moment it had come out from the trees and appeared in the full moonlight.

For the second time since morning his heart cried out—

“ *She is here—she is here—she has come back to me !* ”

He knew that it was she who was approaching,

crossing the grass, the moonlight weaving its films of silver among the white of her dress, making it luminous—exquisitely transparent, like the garment of a ghost.

He rose and waved his hand to her. Her face was turned directly toward him, and he thought that she could not fail to notice him. Still she moved along the grass, making no sign of having seen him. He was surprised; she was still approaching him, and he waved to her again. Looking straight in front of her, he felt that she could not avoid seeing him; but her arms remained by her sides. She made no response to his signal.

It was not until she had come close to where he stood that he became aware of the truth. She was in the oblivious condition in which he had once before seen her—she was asleep. She wore a dressing-robe of white, loose at the throat, exposing part of her neck and shoulders, over which her hair streamed almost down to her waist, the moonlight burnishing it until it glowed like a flame. Her robe was unfastened at the lower part, so that every step exposed her feet and ankles, and he saw that she was wearing slippers. It was plain that she had not risen from her bed under the influence of her somnambulism; she had been sitting up in a room with her dressing-robe around her, and thus she had gone forth into the moonlight.

She slipped past him, and her garment almost brushed his knees. He could not awake her. He allowed her to pass him, and he followed her, at a short distance. She walked straight to the hall door—it was open, as he left it when he had come out—and when she entered the porch he was only a yard or two behind her. A light had, by his instructions, been left burning in the hall before the servants had gone to bed; by its light he saw her go up the staircase to the first lobby. She stood there for a short time,

the moonlight streaming through the painted glass of the coats-of-arms on the high window, making chains of shadowy rubies and emeralds and sapphires, which it flung upon her neck and over her shoulders while she paused for a few moments. He stood at the foot of the stairs watching her, and he was more amazed than ever when he saw her turn and go up the short flight of steps leading to the room where, as he believed, Mr. Chaworth had died by the hand of the fifth Lord Byron. He recollects that he had told her casually of how he had visited this room, but he had certainly not told her where the room was situated or how it was approached.

But he saw her open the door and pass through into the darkness. He hurried up the stairs to the lobby, but he was too fearful of the consequences of awaking her suddenly to venture upon the steps to the room ; he was clumsy upon his feet, and there were no banisters along these steps. He could only stand at the foot and listen. He did so, breathlessly.

She entered, and he heard her speaking in a low voice—just as she had spoken long ago standing opposite the picture in the hall at Annesley. Her voice was so low that he could not hear a sentence that came from her ; but her words sounded like a prayer. It was as if she had met someone in the room face to face, and was imploring him in an earnest whisper to grant a petition that she offered to him. Scarcely a word could he hear distinctly, but he remembered all that he had overheard her say when opposite to the picture of the man who had, he fancied, been killed in that room, and he wondered if she was making a petition to the man by whom he had been killed.

Before many minutes had passed she reappeared at the door, descended the stairs, and went forth once more into the moonlight. He followed her at a distance, across the grass and among the trees of the park. He had never left Newstead by the way she

was now taking, but it appeared that she was well acquainted with its course, for she walked quickly along without stopping to consider what turn to take at any time ; and he found that it was quite a short way to Annesley by this route. He followed her up to the very door of the house, and watched her enter and close the door.

He returned slowly to Newstead, more astonished than he had ever been since that night when he had seen her walking in her sleep on the staircase at Annesley. He could not understand how it was possible for her to go all the way through the park without waking—how it was possible for her to go directly to that room, although no one except himself had visited it for years.

He had not succeeded in seeing any further into the mystery by the time he reached Newstead, and passed through the open door and on to his bedroom.

CHAPTER XII

SHE came to him shortly after noon. She looked neither tired nor sleepless. He gazed into her face, but failed to see on its features any trace of weariness. Her eyes were bright. She seemed almost exultant. He thought of what she had said about the slave and his shackles.

“Mine—mine—my own at last!” he whispered, while he took her to his arms. “Is there anything that can part us now, my beloved? I confess that when you left me yesterday I felt doubtful. I told you that I mistrusted Fate; but now—”

“If the children are once with us, I shall have no misgivings,” said she.

“They will be with us in a couple of hours,” said he.

And then, while the carriage was being made ready, they talked over their arrangements for their flight. They would stay in London for a week or two, until their preparations for the long journey to the East were complete. Then they would leave England until Mr. Musters obtained the divorce that he was almost certain to apply for. Byron in his own mind ridiculed the notion of Lady Caroline throwing herself away upon such a man as Musters. He felt certain that a woman who had shown herself to be ambitious almost to a point of madness would only laugh when Musters assumed that she was greatly in earnest. She was fooling the man, just as she had fooled other men.

He did not, however, think it necessary to express

his views on this point to Mary. He talked to her about her children until the carriage which was to bring them from Southwell was at the door.

They both seemed to feel the exhilarating influence of the drive along the road to the village. He held her hand, while they talked madly of the birds—the wildflowers—the scents of the orchards—the glory and gladness of the meadows. It was not merely exhilaration that they experienced—it was intoxication. Everything in the world seemed made for lovers this day, and they felt that there had never been lovers in the world before this day.

They laughed at the awkward courtships of the rustics sitting under the hedges of the hay-fields after their mid-day meals ; they laughed at the love-making quarrels of the birds in the straggling boughs that overhung the road ; they laughed at the youth in the market cart who sat with his arm about the waist of the young woman on the uneasy seat by his side—it seemed to be good to laugh in such a world — it seemed that the whole world was made for love and laughter.

A couple of miles on their way they met a great wain of hay pausing by the roadside. It had been badly packed, and one of the ropes meant to secure the load had slackened so that a hundredweight of the load had escaped. Byron asked the men if they needed another hand to help them. They touched their hats and said they had made the load secure. A couple of miles farther on still, and they saw in the distance another breakdown.

“ It is blocking up the whole road ; we shall have difficulty in passing it,” said Byron, looking ahead, leaning over the carriage.

“ There is quite a crowd—that is what makes the road seem impassable,” said Mary, looking out at the other side.

“ There’s a horse down and—the fields must be

left without labourers ; they all seem to be crowding around the vehicle," said Byron.

As they got closer to the scene, he cried out—

"Good heavens ! I recognise the queer shape of that new machine that Vince got built for himself. There are no other shafts like those in the county ; and his horse showed temper the first time he was put between them. Vince was uncertain ; he would not let me ride with him. I hope he is not killed."

"Someone is lying on the side of the bank," said Mary. "That is the doctor's phaeton—he is—oh, Byron—Byron—something has happened—something dreadful ! Ah, my God ! 'tis my husband—he is killed ! he is killed ! Look at his face ! Death—death ! "

The crowd that occupied the full breadth of the road parted as the carriage drove up. Byron took in the personnel of the group beside the doctor. Lady Caroline Lamb stood there, pale and dishevelled, holding a smelling bottle to her nose ; at a little distance Vince stood in his shirt sleeves. One of his arms was bandaged. On the side of the bank lay Mr. Musters, his face looking amazing in its whiteness —there was something awful about the pallor of the face that had never been seen otherwise than rubicund. It was like a foolish caricature of the face of Mr. Musters ; the caricaturist had been grimly ironical, and had made it white as marble.

But what was most horrible about it was the stare that was in the eyes. The eyes were open, and there was a curious fixity in their stare. His mouth was twisted, showing some of his teeth.

Mary was kneeling beside him in a moment. Byron turned away. He could not bear to see her beside him again, even though the man was dead.

He looked around for an explanation of the accident. The open chaise that stood in the middle of the road, with half the hood and one of the panels torn away,

was Musters', and the vehicle with the long shafts—both of them smashed—was the one which Vince had built for himself. He knew so much, but no more. An accident had happened, but he could not even hazard a guess as to its nature or origin. There was Lady Caroline standing apart from everyone with her smelling bottle. How did she come to be in the accident? If she had been driving in the chaise with Mr. Musters, how was it that she had escaped unhurt?

And Vince—how was it that Vince had his arm bandaged?

Lady Caroline came quickly toward him with uplifted hands and a pallid face.

He crossed the road to Vince.

"It is very sad—very sad—he is not dead," said Vince.

"Do one's eyes stare like his if one is not dead?" said Byron. "How did it happen?"

"He is not dead—I shall never forgive myself—it was my fault," said Vince. "My horse in the new machine bolted with me. We ran down the chaise with Lady Caroline and Mr. Musters on the back seat. The brute—I allude to the horse—fairly charged the chaise with those two long shafts like lances; one of them went through the hood and struck the man on the spine. That is how he comes to be lying there speechless and with staring eyes; he is paralysed, the doctor told us. We sent one of the men for the doctor. He is an intelligent man—the intelligence of a physician is not always intelligible. He examined Mr. Musters, and says that he may live—that is, be kept alive—for a number of years, but he will never have the use of his legs—he may never be able to speak again. He may get into the way of cursing with his eyes. He is a man of resource."

"You are a callous wretch, and if you are never able to use your arm again you will only have got

part of your deserts," said Byron. "Is your arm broken?"

"No; I saved it by knocking the coachman off the box," said Vince. "You are right, my lord; no punishment could be adequate to what I deserve. I am a melancholy bungler."

He turned away from the man without another word and watched Mary, still kneeling by the side of the man who had made her life one of perpetual bitterness for her; there he lay with that horrible stare of the living-dead in his eyes.

The doctor was now leaning over her, speaking in her ear. She raised her head, and apparently answered his question. The doctor hastened to Byron.

"Mrs. Musters tells me that the carriage is yours, my lord. We need such a conveyance to carry Mr. Musters home, and beg leave of your lordship—"

"Make use of it, by all means," said Byron. "He is paralysed, I hear, but he will live."

"Sensation has gone from one side and all the lower part of his body; the shaft just missed killing him by half an inch," said the doctor.

"So that he will continue within half an inch off death so long as he breathes," said Byron.

"Your lordship puts it very neatly," said the doctor, with genuine appreciation of an apt definition. "Half an inch off death all his life—excellent! But if Lord Byron, our greatest master of language, failed, where should we look? Oh, Mrs. Musters, his lordship has had the kindness to place his carriage at the disposal of our unfortunate sufferer! We shall lose no time—thank you, my lord."

He went off, leaving Mary by the side of Byron. She gave him her hand.

"It was not to be," she said in a low voice.

"No; it was not to be—now; but—"

"Dear Byron—my own true love—you will have

to bear the blow that has fallen on us both," said she. "It will be hard for you."

"But for you, Mary?"

"It will not be so hard for me. I have been so made the sport of Fate that another buffet is of no account. I thought that at last—at last—some happiness was to come into my life; but it was not to be. Good-bye, my dear love! When I say good-bye to you I have said farewell to happiness for ever."

"For ever? What do you mean? You cannot mean that it is your intention to give up the rest of your life to him—to be his nurse—attendant to a man who is more than half dead?"

"Let us walk up the road—away from these people," she said, and they went on side by side a short way.

"Dear Byron," she said—her voice shook, the tears were overflowing her eyes. "Dear Byron, think of it all, and you will see as clearly as I do that no choice is left for me in this matter. I must stay by my poor husband now so long as I live—so long as he lives. What would you think of a woman who would leave her husband after so terrible a thing has happened to him? Do you fancy that you would ever be happy with such a woman as that? I know what would be on your mind every time you saw me, and I should be worthy only of the contempt in which you would hold me."

"But with him—with him!" he cried. "Oh, my love, your life will be like his—more than half death—more than half death!"

"It will be my life—the lot that it is the will of Heaven for me to bear. I bow my head to the cross that Heaven tells me I must bear. Perhaps it is my punishment for my presumption in assuming that I knew in what direction my happiness lay. Dear Byron, I feel that I am saying good-bye to you on the brink of the grave. So long as I live I shall not cease to think of you and to pray for you

out of the darkness of my living grave. Good-bye
—good-bye!"

He did not say a word. He bowed his head down to her hand. He kissed it, and left it wet with his tears.

The doctor beckoned to her from the carriage. She walked without faltering to the vehicle, across the cushions of which her husband lay. The signal was given, and the horses began to move.

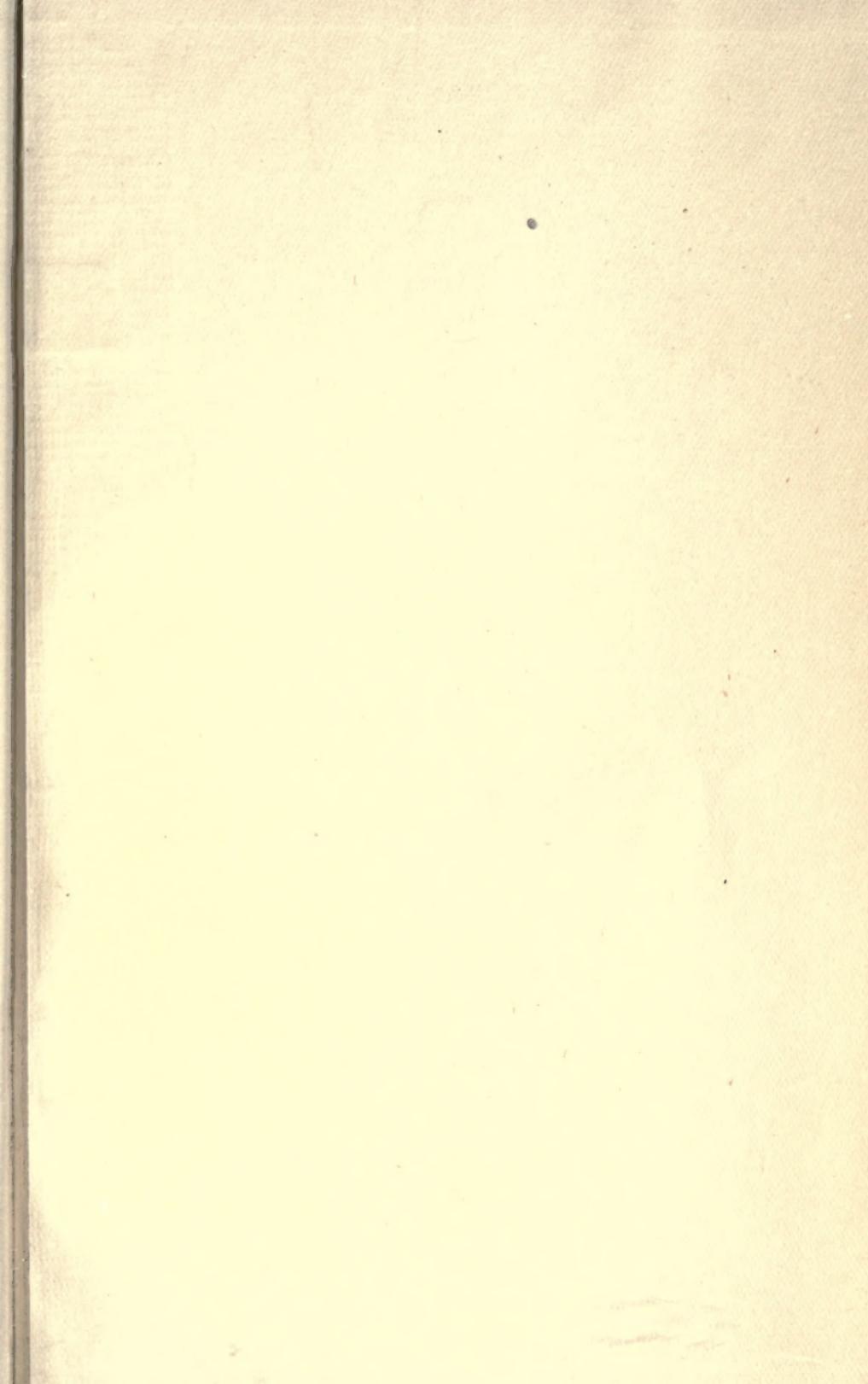
She never looked back.

One by one the people of the little crowd that had been about the carriage melted away; but Byron remained standing where Mary had left him. He watched the carriage pass away into the distance slowly as if it were a coach of the dead.

He stood there on the empty, silent road until there was nothing of it to be seen. He knew that with it his hope of happiness had disappeared for ever.

THE END

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Moore, Frank Frankfort
He loved but one

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